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ABSTRACT

This handbook provides ideas for Pennsylvania school districts attempting to get parents more involved in school programs. There are five sections. The first describes the importance of parent involvement and defines such involvement as "meaningful partnerships between parents and school which demonstrate commitment to improving student performance, increasing student achievement, and enhancing the quality of school programs which provide effective two-way communication between the school and the community." Section two provides suggestions for programs at the district level that can be used to generate parent and community involvement. A planning process is outlined, and recommendations are focused on community education, school-business partnerships, and working with citizens' advisory committees. Section three suggests building level activities and practices, and section four lists techniques that promote better communication. Section five is a directory of resources and sample policies schools can use when developing their parent involvement efforts. An appendix contains useful resources, including guidelines and program assessment instruments. (KH)

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Turning the Tide

Parent Involvement Handbook

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An Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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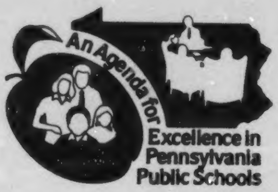
October 1984

Turning the Tide

Parent Involvement Handbook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Pennsylvania Department of Education 1984

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The parent's role in the educational process is vital to a child's success. Over the past 20 years, research has consistently uncovered two benefits of positive parent involvement: student achievement goes up and support for schools increases. Yet, with shifting family structures and changing lifestyles, schools are finding it more and more difficult to communicate effectively with parents and get them involved in school programs. As attendance at school conferences and PTA meetings continues to drop, schools need to find other meaningful ways to involve parents in the educational process at all levels. Schools must develop fresh approaches that cultivate partnerships with parents and provide a variety of opportunities to generate support for schools. We must help parents realize that they, too, are responsible for the quality of learning taking place in Pennsylvania's classrooms.

In Turning the Tide: An Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools, Governor Dick Thornburgh encouraged local school districts to get parents more involved in school programs. He said: "School districts should expand their efforts to involve parents in the education process. Parents who are actively involved in and concerned about their children's schoolwork will enforce good study habits, encourage their children to take more demanding courses, and nurture their children's creativity, curiosity, and desire to learn."

This handbook is designed to give practical meaning to "parent involvement" and suggest ways it can be accomplished in your school. With the help of the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association (PenSPRA) and the Pennsylvania Social Workers Consortium, the Education Department has developed a set of ideas you can use to assist in planning your parent involvement efforts. A resource file listing sample publications, good ideas, and programs that work is also included.

The handbook is one component in a Parent Involvement campaign being conducted this year by the Department. The campaign includes public service announcements and a series of brochures to help parents understand the critical role they play in student achievement. Information about the campaign is available through the Education Department's Office of Press and Communications, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-0333.

Parent Involvement

The term "parent involvement" has been applied to a broad range of school-home interactions, from participation in parent conferences to attendance at school functions to in-classroom volunteers.

The Education Department defines "parent involvement" in this way: Meaningful partnerships between parents and schools which demonstrate commitment to improving student performance, increasing student achievement, and enhancing the quality of school programs which provide effective two-way communications between the school and the community.

The concept, in fact, goes beyond the home and school and encompasses the entire community--including elderly persons and other citizens who don't have children in school, members of social, civic, and community groups, and the whole range of taxpayers who invest heavily in their community's schools.

School districts must develop strategies which enable them to involve parents and parent groups, community leaders and other citizens, and all segments of their communities in the life of their schools.

This handbook is designed to help you do that. It is divided into five parts: Section One is the introduction, which describes how this Parent Involvement effort relates to Turning the Tide: The Governor's Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools; Section Two provides suggestions for programs at the district level that can be used to generate effective parent and community involvement; Section Three focuses on building-level activities and practices; Section Four lists techniques that promote better communications; and Section Five gives resources and sample policies schools can use when developing their parent involvement efforts.

The handbook has been produced in a looseleaf format so that it can be updated. We encourage you to add successful practices or new ideas to the handbook whenever you encounter them. Samples of materials that work particularly well or lists of resources that come in handy can be inserted so that they will be easily located when you need them.

The handbook would not have been possible without the permission of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) to adapt and duplicate existing NSPRA materials; the assistance of NSPRA members throughout the country whose tip sheets have been revised to focus on Pennsylvania's needs; the Alaska Guide to School Communications and Public Relations, which served as a model for our handbook; and technical contributions and production assistance by members of the Pennsylvania Department of Education staff.

The Pennsylvania Parent Involvement Handbook was developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with the Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association (PenSPRA). It was prepared by Judi Boren, President, PenSPRA; Louise Guthrie, Vice-President, East, PenSPRA; Jacqueline Cerra, Vice-President, West, PenSPRA; and Linda Walter, Office of Press and Communications, Pennsylvania Department of Education.

District Level

Planning for Parent Involvement

Establishing meaningful partnerships with parents and other citizens in the community is best achieved by schools which plan their parent involvement efforts. The planning process involves four basic steps: analyzing, action-planning, implementing, and evaluation.

Step One: Analyzing

- Survey community attitudes and interests.
- Learn as much as you can about key people, procedures, problems, programs, and policies.
- Determine how parents are currently being involved in your schools.
- Identify new ways parents can be involved.

Step Two: Action-Planning

- Develop a comprehensive parent involvement policy.
- Prepare a parent involvement plan, outlining goals, objectives, and strategies.
- Determine resources needed to supplement the existing channels for parent involvement.
- Analyze and develop new channels. Establish a procedure for using them effectively.
- Get community members involved in the planning.
- Set priorities.

Step Three: Implementation

- Target programs to different audiences, making sure you tailor them to meet different needs.
- Get school staff members involved. Make them aware that parent involvement is a school priority.
- Set timelines and meet them. Make everyone aware of your deadlines and goals so as to work within the parameters you've set.
- Find ways to highlight parent involvement in newsletters, news articles, recognition programs, and other communications avenues.

Step Four: Evaluation

- Listen. What is being said and how are people reacting to your communications efforts?
- Survey. Ask people, through planned means, their opinions and reactions to what you have been doing.
- React to the feedback you obtain. Is it justified? What does it tell you about the effectiveness of your program? How can you use this feedback to improve your program?
- Be honest with yourself. Are you accomplishing your objectives? Are you using your goals to chart your course?

SOURCE: Jean Lowery, Director of Public Relations, Dalton Public Schools, Dalton, Georgia, and the National School Public Relations Association.

Involving the Entire Community: A Sure Road to Support

It has been shown time and time again that citizens who have had recent contact with a public school are more supportive of education, and that includes citizens with and without school-age children. In days of tight budgets, schools need support from all segments of the community, and they can get it with a creative effort to show people first-hand what education is all about.

This strategy is based on two assumptions: (1) Critics of public education often speak out of ignorance and base their attacks on misinformation and hearsay; and (2) people will defend and support something they have had a part in creating. Therefore, a school district's efforts to involve citizens in education should be directed toward showing citizens how schools operate and making them a part of the instructional and decision-making process. The following school district public relations projects and community involvement efforts are good examples:

- Community education programs give adults a feeling of ownership in the school because it is helping them, too. Even if your district does not have a formal community education program, make the school building available to the community for programs or courses in the evenings.

- Open houses should be scheduled frequently and should not be restricted to parents. Make an effort to attract senior citizens and young residents without children, too. What you want people to see is how schools operate on a typical day, how students are learning, and how rumors they might have heard about chaos or lack of discipline are untrue.

- Volunteers provide the best pipelines you can find to the community. These people can do a myriad of chores within the school, from reading to young children and helping the office with the paperwork to supporting bilingual efforts. Their value is not just in helping the school do its job better; as a part of the school, they become missionaries spreading the good word back in their neighborhoods and communities.

- Citizens advisory boards are required by law for some programs and by some states, and they're a good idea anywhere. They give a school district formal input from the community about a variety of topics, providing a perspective that might have been lacking otherwise. Of course, the board and the superintendent make final decisions, but a board's contributions should be given serious consideration. And whether a board's recommendations are followed or not, every member who served on one should be thanked formally by the board.

- Liaison committees can foster teamwork with segments of the community that have common interests in public education, such as local business and industry, higher education, community groups, service and social clubs, religious groups, youth groups, and so forth. Each of these groups has a great deal to offer the schools, and by channeling their interests through a formal committee structure, you can make them partners in education, too.

Finally, there may be those people you never will get into a school building, particularly in cities, so how about ways of taking the school to them? Put your schools on display in community centers, popular stores, churches, or shopping malls--whether it's student artwork and musical performances or a transplanted classroom lesson--it will open a lot of people's eyes.

SOURCE: The National School Public Relations Association.

Getting and Keeping Parents Involved

- Parents need to know you really want and need their help. Sending out a notice saying that may not be convincing. Personal contact works much better. It is more difficult to say "no" to a telephone request than it is to one presented on a crumpled paper carried home by a child. Furthermore, this personal contact can help insure a broadly based committee instead of one comprised of the people who volunteer for everything.

- Parents need to know the scope of a committee or project's purpose, the time commitment expected of them, and that what they are doing is important to the school and their children. This should be included in the recruitment effort to attract members.

- Parents must be convinced that their services/advice/recommendations will be thoroughly considered when decisions are reached.

- Parents need to feel that their efforts are appreciated. In addition to a simple thank you, show concern about transportation and child care for those attending meetings. Publicize names and committee appointments, plan appreciation dinners or other activities, include members' photos in yearbooks and/or news articles.

- Parents need to understand the process used for decision-making. Not all parents have experience in tradition reaching group decisions and the processes necessary to accomplish this. If parents are expected to be true partners in decisions, the process (and the administrator) should not be allowed to intimidate or dominate them. Prepare everyone for mistakes, broken communications, upsets, setbacks, temporary lags in action.

SOME SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE NEEDED:

- Not all parents had a happy experience with their own schooling and may need strong encouragement to return to a school building.

- A more neutral setting than a school may work better--church, community center, etc.

- Language may be the source of another problem--some parents feel that they do not express themselves well and will be further intimidated by "educationese" jargon.

- Non-English or limited English-speaking parents face other barriers. Send invitations out in the language they use or have a person who speaks their language call them. Be sure to have bilingual people at all meetings so that parents can express themselves in languages they speak.

- Some parents expect immediate solutions or quick responses to recommendations. It may be wise to provide some skills in group decision-making or divide the work or areas of concern into small sections so that success can be seen in some areas while others continue to be studied.

SOURCE: Doris Payne, former Special Assistant to Superintendent for Communications
Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, Illinois.

Community Education

A Model of Cooperation and Involvement

Community education, as defined in the Pennsylvania Community Education Plan, is the process in which individual persons, community groups, organizations, and local, private, and governmental agencies cooperate to provide educational, recreational, vocational, cultural, social, health, and other related services to meet community needs through the use of education and other facilities. In short, Community Education is the use of the community's resources for the people of the community.

How can a community begin?

(a) Have your school district board of school directors and your township or borough supervisors/councilors appoint a citizens advisory council. This council should include representatives of business, industry, churches, local government, and public and private cultural and service agencies as well as students, teachers, parents, and other citizens.

(b) The council needs to design its own structure. A meeting place must be chosen, preferably a public building. Arrangements must be made for minutes of meetings to be taken and distributed along with other materials provided. (Duplication and mailing costs could be absorbed by the school district or by the local government agency.)

(c) An assessment of the community's needs may be accomplished through an open meeting at which suggestions for tasks for the council are accepted.

(d) Once a list of tasks or "studies" has been provided by the community, the council can set priorities and appoint a task force for the first job.

(e) The council should provide the task force with guidelines to follow where developing the study and making recommendations.

(f) Recommendations of all task forces should be presented in writing and orally (by task force spokespersons) to the council. The council should reply by endorsing the recommendations or giving reason for rejection.

(g) The local agency (school district, local government, etc.) to whom recommendations are to be made should respond in a public forum so that citizens know how they will implement the recommendations or, if they will not, why not.

(h) All citizens must have an opportunity to volunteer for task force duty, to make comments and suggestions at public meetings, and to ask questions about recommendations when they are finally made.

In this atmosphere in which community problems are identified and studied by citizen groups in a public arena, it is inevitable that local groups will come to work more closely together, respect one another, help one another and ultimately provide better services to citizens at no greater cost, possibly at a lesser cost, than before.

Community Education is a process which encourages all citizens to take part in the decision-making which must be done. It can encompass parks and recreation, life-long learning in the public schools, interagency cooperation, transportation, energy conservation, environmental control, and economic planning for the future.

Community Education begins with one small seed and blossoms when all citizens are benefiting from the use of resources. It is democracy at work!

School/Business Partnerships

Throughout Pennsylvania, school districts are increasing efforts to work with business and community leaders to develop additional educational opportunities for students, build business awareness among school staff members, and help the community attract new industries. Try these ideas:

- Ask local business leaders to suggest ways they can help students and the schools. Be sure to request information about any specific skills needed for employment in various firms located in the school district.
- Ask if there are ways the school districts can help business leaders in offering job retraining opportunities in community education classes.
- Ask business leaders to assist schools by providing management studies, staff development, budget preparation assistance and long-range planning.
- Establish a business/industry/education council to promote and encourage continuous communication and cooperation with schools.
- Develop a speakers bureau of business leaders in the community who are willing to discuss careers and training with students (K-12).
- Work with local business groups to arrange plant and office tours for students. Set up "shadowing" opportunities for older students to spend a day observing a business person; and "internships" to provide real work experience for interested juniors and seniors in high school.
- Establish an adopt-a-school program wherein businesses and schools can be paired. Help individual schools develop a list of needs and invite businesses to review them and suggest ways they would like to help. These

should be geared to participation by business, not merely financial donations.

- Volunteer the services of district administrators, the superintendent, and board members to work with the Chamber of Commerce as part of a team actively recruiting new business and industry for your community.

- Ask the Chamber of Commerce to undertake a needs assessment of the community and work with the schools to meet community concerns.

- Establish teacher training sessions over the summer in local banks, industrial plants, and businesses to build staff awareness and skills regarding business careers and the free enterprise system.

- Invite business leaders to assist with programs for the gifted and talented; to serve as guest lecturers and/or instructors in science, mathematics, computer training, and other areas; and to offer special programs in their companies for students.

- Use successful community leaders as well as business leaders to serve as role models for students. Seek the involvement of minority and community leaders in the development of career programs for students.

SOURCE: National School Public Relations Association.

Making Parent Involvement Work in Small Schools

In spite of limited time, financial resources, and personnel, even small school districts can offer comprehensive, effective parent involvement programs. Small districts can take advantage of their size to get parents involved and generate community support. In a small district, the program can take on a more personal quality, and schools can set up special relationships with parents and community groups. Here are a few tips:

- Plan to have an on-going program.

- Compile a list of current parent involvement activities.

- Give priority to groups of parents and other people in your community you want to involve first.

- Identify what orientation and training programs need to be developed.

- Encourage staff to be an integral part of the community.

- Work closely with local media--radio stations, newspapers, cable television companies. Don't forget weekly papers. Larger dailies are more inclined to cover larger districts.

- Make schools available for community use.

- Promote a "we care" attitude.

- Listen to people.

- Consider the following parent involvement opportunities:

- Open Office Hours - Being accessible to the parents is important, and the "open office hours" concept demonstrates it. Even in the smallest school districts there is a feeling that the average citizen cannot communicate directly with the superintendent.

- What's For Breakfast? - Invite selected community leaders, parents, non-parents, business leaders to join the superintendent and staff for breakfast and an informal agenda. Share information about the school and its needs. Ask for questions and suggestions.

- Neighborhood Walk - Visit the neighborhoods of the district during the summer with various principals, teachers and parents. Dress informally and meet those people who are working in their yards or enjoying summer evenings. Start conversations about the community and schools.

- Hats Off - Express appreciation to parents who are always doing those little extra things to benefit the school district. Professional and support staff members can nominate parents who've been helpful or other community members who've been actively involved in the school. Establish an award system which could include a certificate presented at a board meeting, a picture in the local newspaper, or an interview on the local television or radio program.

- SWAP Day - Suggest that students at the secondary school take a day off from school with your blessing and invite a parent or neighbor (senior citizen) to attend class instead. If you don't want to dismiss the students, ask them to bring the adult along with them on SWAP day. A twist to this is to invite business leaders to SWAP with a teacher for a day--the teacher try his or her hand at the office or business activity and the business leader at teaching. You'll be surprised at the new respect with which the business leaders view the schools, and your staff members will have a new appreciation for business.

- Key Communicators - Identify those parents who have their "fingers on the pulse" in your school community, those persons who talk with large numbers of people and are usually the first to know of potential problems. Get to know these people and encourage them to keep you informed of any problems or rumors they hear about. Ask for their advice, and assure them that you value their assistance.

SOURCE: National School Public Relations Assocation; Duane Bachman, Piqua School District, Piqua, Ohio; and Norman Maguire, Minnesota Association of School Administrators, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Working with Citizens Advisory Committees

A successful, effective citizens advisory committee is most often identifiable in a district where the superintendent and board have charged the committee with a specific task, indicated the date for the committee to begin work, and set the date for the committee to disband.

Care and caution must be taken in using a citizens advisory committee. It is not another board of education; it is not a surrogate board; nor is it intended to displace or replace board thinking, board action or board responsibility.

When the committee is formed, members must be told where the money is coming from to fund the work they are asked to do, where they are to get help, who is to be the liaison with the superintendent and board, and what resources are at their disposal.

What to Do

- Publish qualifications for membership on the committee.
- Decide whether the committee is to be appointed, elected, or otherwise selected from volunteers.
- Give the committee a major purpose, objectives, guidelines, dates to begin and end.
- Provide orientation for committee members.
- Decide if the committee is to be district-wide or if it will serve a particular school attendance area.
- Make clear that the extent of the committee's authority is advisory only.
- Encourage the committee to record and keep detailed notes of all meetings.

- Appoint a liaison person to communicate between the committee and the superintendent and/or board.

- Keep committee members informed so that they may function effectively.

- Provide the means for the committee to communicate with all citizens.

- Provide suitable quarters for committee meetings.

- Make certain that public notice of all committee meetings is made in advance so that interested citizens may attend. All meetings should be open to the public.

Problems

- Apathy in the community and among committee members after the first blush is gone.

- Too much time required of committee members who have jobs, other obligations.

- Difficulty in scheduling meetings convenient to majority.

- Domination of committee by one individual or a pressure clique.

- Keeping the committee on the subject--not allowing it to get involved in side issues.

- Getting qualified citizens to serve on the citizens advisory committee.

- Finding ways to train the committee to do its job.

Ending A Project

After the committee presents its recommendations to the superintendent and board of education, it is important for the board to communicate directly with the committee about what action it will take on the recommendations. A good time to do this is at a final meeting when the committee is disbanded. If the committee is told orally about what the board will do with the recommendations, the information should also be given in writing to the committee.

Dissolving the Committee

Since the purpose of an advisory committee is to study a particular issue or complete a certain project and to formulate recommendations for a final report to the board, the life of a committee should end when its report is received.

If a board wishes to continue the committee until final resolution of its recommendations, then committee members should be invited to a public board meeting to elicit comments and suggestions from other residents.

It is not necessary for the committee to remain in place after its task is finished. In fact, this could cause some problems for administrators.

When the report is presented, committee members should be thanked by the board president - individually and sincerely. The board president should write each committee member a letter thanking him or her on behalf of the board. In addition, if the district has certificates of appreciation or something similar, it would be nice to present one to each committee member. An article of thanks can also be sent to the local news media and included in the school newsletter.

Building Level

School Volunteers

When an adult--parent, non-parent, or senior citizen--enters the school as a volunteer, everyone benefits. A school volunteer is an adult who is willing to give time and talent to help the educational team better serve the needs of children. With careful planning, a lasting partnership can develop between the volunteer and the school.

Volunteers can:

- Improve instruction - by permitting more individual help for students, with direction from the teacher.
- Enrich curriculum - by adding their experiences, special interests, hobbies, and knowledge, where appropriate.
- Close the "generation gap" - by providing more opportunities for children and adults to exchange ideas.
- Improve school-community relations - by bringing more adults into the schools to see today's schools first-hand.

Principals offer the following suggestions when beginning a volunteer program.

1. Get the commitment of staff. Without the active support of teachers, librarians, and support staff, the program cannot succeed.
2. Appoint a volunteer coordinator. In some schools, the program is coordinated by a teacher, a paid aide or a volunteer parent who agrees to serve for one year.

3. Match volunteers with jobs. Some people want only to work directly with children. Others prefer to help behind the scenes - correcting papers, preparing bulletin boards, etc. Still others may wish to help from home.

4. Provide volunteer training on an on-going basis. Include information on the need for confidentiality, orientation to the school and procedures, basic skills for volunteers and special training in the use of computers or audio visual equipment.

5. Make parents feel welcomed and needed. When volunteers know they are needed, they will stick to a regular schedule.

6. Keep the lines of communication open. Defuse any problems quickly. Deal with minor problems before they develop into crises.

Discipline: What Can Be Done at Home

Tips for Parents

1. Be informed. Know your school district policy about student conduct.

2. Be supportive of your school discipline policy. If you have questions about it or problems with it, discuss them with the school's disciplinarian or superintendent.

3. Be a part of it. When your school or district organizes a task force to study, develop or clarify school policy, volunteer to serve. Give your best ideas and thoughtful consideration to the task.

4. Be aware. Understand the importance of good discipline to the child and to the overall climate of the school and understand the effect that extracurricular activities have on your child's schoolwork.

5. Be a model. Set an example by providing an understanding but firm model of discipline for your child.

6. Be involved. Keep the lines of communication open between you and the school staff through parent visits and conferences.

7. Be positive. Speak in positive terms about school, teachers, and the student conduct code.

8. Be consistent. But if something isn't working out, bend a little and try another way. Bargaining can sometimes be useful.

9. Be reasonable and understanding. When possible, explain why things have to be the way they are and try to understand a child's feelings about how things are.

10. Be firm. Once guidelines are set, parents should agree with and support one another in disciplinary actions. Changes in rules should be made together. Stick to your decisions. Don't let your child talk you out of a punishment if it is needed.

SOURCES: "Developing Clear Policies for Discipline, Attendance, Homework," the Pennsylvania Department of Education; News for Your Parents, Macomb Intermediate Unit School District, Michigan; and the Student Advisory Board, 1983-84.

Attendance: What Can Be Done at Home

Tips for Parents

1. Show an active interest in your child's school. Attend school meetings and programs, participate on task forces and in school activities whenever possible.

2. Discuss the importance of good attendance in learning skills and developing self-discipline with your child. Stress the importance of a good education to future success and make good attendance a priority.

3. Know your school district's policies and procedures regarding attendance and insist on compliance with school regulations.

4. Be a positive role model for your child.

5. Encourage the development of good personal habits. See that your child gets sufficient sleep and gets up for school on time.

6. Show an interest in daily school activities. Discuss school-related problems with your child.

7. Maintain close contact with your child's teachers and school administrators. Check on your child's progress regularly and notify the school when your child is to be absent.

8. Schedule family trips during your school's vacation periods to cut down on the amount of time your child is out of class.

9. Understand attendance laws and make your children aware of them.

10. Available absences for good reasons should be minimized and reported to school officials. Illegal absences should not be encouraged or excused.

SOURCES: "Developing Clear Policies for Discipline, Attendance, Homework," the Pennsylvania Department of Education; News for Your Parents, Macomb Intermediate Unit School District, Michigan; and the Student Advisory Board, 1983-84.

Homework: What Can Be Done at Home

Tips for Parents

1. Provide a quiet, well-lighted study area with a desk or table and comfortable chair. (A soft chair may be ideal for reading assignments but not working at a desk or table.)

2. Keep study tools available: Pencils, sharpener, pen, crayons, paper, ruler, dictionary. (An atlas, encyclopedia, and globe of the world are valuable at-home aids also.)

3. Establish a regular time for homework. (Although home activities and appointments may require change of homework time, consistency helps to make study at home a habit of learning. For the primary child especially, doing homework immediately after school may be inadvisable since he or she may need the change of pace provided by rest or play.)

4. Limit television viewing and avoid TV or radio listening during study time. (Soft music may contribute to concentration on occasion, but popular favorites tend to distract attention from homework.)

5. Ask your children about their homework assignments and help them budget their time for completion and ample sleep.

6. Encourage step-by-step work on long term or major projects to avoid last-minute, careless work.

7. At his or her request, help your child with homework tasks and show your interest in successful completion. Do not do the work for your child. If you need help, contact the teacher.

8. Share your own interest in reading, writing, learning, or special talents with your child to show that you value learning.

9. Encourage your child to practice learning skills in home chores: shopping, home and yard care, personal belongings, care of pets.

10. Consider family trips and vacations that provide enriching learning experiences.

SOURCES: "Developing Clear Policies for Discipline, Attendance, Homework," the Pennsylvania Department of Education; New for Your Parents, Macomb Intermediate Unit School District, Michigan; and the National Education Association.

Involving Senior Citizens

To build public confidence in the American educational system, it is imperative that school districts reach out to a politically powerful and ever-growing segment of people--senior citizens. They have the potential to be a helpful and supportive group.

Get them into the schools, make them a part of the educational program, and turn cynics into supporters. Design a special program that will encourage senior citizen participation in school activities.

Most senior citizens have a lot of time and a lot of skills, but usually have few opportunities to use either constructively.

- Establish a "Gold Card Club" for citizens who are age 65 or older. Give each member a card that will allow them to attend and participate in all school activities free of charge.
- Initiate a "Senior Citizens Pen Pal Program." Have students in grades 1-12 participate. They can write to members of the Gold Card Club who have expressed an interest in the program. With English teachers and homeroom teachers as sponsors, students write to their senior citizen pen pals at least twice a month to share information about classroom and school activities. They also extend invitations to their pals to attend various school activities.
- Implement a "Foster Grandparent Program."
- Plan "Grandparents Week." Invite them to have lunch at the school, sit in on classrooms, and tour the building.
- Conduct a "Tour of the Schools" for senior citizens via school buses picking them up at predetermined placed in the community. Maximize the use of time on the bus by talking to them about the schools, programs, finances, etc.

- Contact nursing homes to arrange an "exchange visit." Students can visit nursing homes, and nursing home citizens who are physically able can visit the school. A pen-pal network can also be established.

- Allow senior citizens the opportunity to serve as classroom aides. They can give individual attention to children, talk about their careers or hobbies, teach crafts, and serve as tutors.

Senior citizens who are involved with children and schools will be less likely to oppose necessary school expenditures and tax increases. Make your school a winner by establishing programs that involve the "Gray Generation."

SOURCE: Jacquelyn Tolber, Kilgore Independent School District, Kilgore, Texas; Donn Drew, Jefferson City Schools, Jefferson City, Missouri; and National School Public Relations Association.

Key Communicators

Identify parents and other citizens who have their "fingers on the pulse" of your community. This network of key people can establish two-way communication between your school and its publics. They are barbers, gas station operators, clergy, realtors, merchants, mail carriers, bartenders, and beauticians who talk to many people in their daily work. They are community leaders, presidents of civic and social organizations, and people who volunteer for community service agencies. Find out who they are in your community and get them involved in your school. Here's how to set up your network.

- The school principal or superintendent sends a letter telling these people they are invited to attend a meeting and asking them to serve as key communicators.

- The small-group meetings are informal and designed to help the key communicators and principals get to know each other.

- Key communicators are asked to telephone the principal when they hear a rumor.

- The principal promises to answer the key communicators about rumors by giving them the facts.

- The principal also promises to send information by letter or telephone to key communicators so they know the FACTS when an incident occurs.

- The principal tells the key communicators that they will meet two or three times a year and that key communicators will be given school publications and general information on a regular basis.

- The key communicators group is different from parent/teacher groups in that it handles crisis situations and rumors. Parent/teacher groups can be helpful in disseminating information about curriculum, budget, athletics, schedules, and day-to-day operating procedures for the school.

- A key communicators group costs little or no money.
- It works because neighbors and friends believe one another more than they believe the media.

SOURCE: Don Bagin, Glasboro State College, Glasboro, New Jersey.

Special Techniques for Special Parents

Gone are the days when school children go home to a father who works in the labor force and a mother who works full-time in the home taking care of two children. The U.S. Bureau of Census reports that less than 10 percent of America's families conform to this traditional stereotype. Today, most mothers and fathers work in the labor force. There are 10 million single mothers responsible for children. There are minority parents, parents of children with handicaps, ethnic parents, parents who are migrant workers, and parents who lack English language skills. Because of the diversity of American parents, you may need to take a few extra steps to get parents involved in your school. Some basics you can use are:

- Survey your community. Get a clear picture of what kinds and how many different groups of parents there are. Ask about their special needs, interests, and concerns. Try to identify the barriers that can keep these parents from getting involved in your school.

- Schedule workshops and meetings on specific topics that address identified concerns. If parents are concerned about drug abuse, discipline, or community problems, these should be the topics of your workshop.

- Offer sessions in neighborhood homes if that's a better way to reach parents. Ask one family to volunteer the use of a living room and a coffee pot for an hour or so.

- Encourage teachers to send notes, make calls or visit homes as often as possible. Parents may be more inclined to come to the school and get involved after a personal invitation.

- Make sure you have a translator available for those parents who don't speak English. Have school materials printed in other languages, too.

- Provide opportunities for staff and parents to get together socially. Sports events, street fairs, pot-luck suppers, and bazaars are fun for everyone and can build relationships you could never achieve in formal conferences.

- Ask these parents to serve on committees and task forces you appoint so that their interests and concerns are represented. Remember to get their views on such issues as textbook selection, educational planning, and school closings. Involve these parents before they feel the need to band together and form special interest groups that could develop adversarial relationships with your school.

- Be aware of and sensitive to the parents' special needs. Conduct sensitivity workshops for staff and students. Be supportive, without being over-indulgent. Be honest and be fair.

- When reaching out to these groups, make sure you've identified the most effective channels: What organizations do they belong to? Who are their spokespersons and leaders? What places do they frequent? Where are their neighborhood centers? Where do they work?

Some SPECIAL Tips

MINORITY Parents

1. Educators should explore any of their own personal attitudes and actions that might reinforce negative stereotypes of and prejudices toward minorities.

2. Encourage acceptance and understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity. Be aware of religious and cultural holidays when planning sports schedules, meetings, etc.

3. Include integrated materials in your displays, printed materials, publications, libraries, and classrooms.

4. Use parents as community resources.

5. Understand and appreciate different language patterns and be open and tolerant when you communicate and interact with parents.

SOURCE: Division of School Equity
Pennsylvania Department of Education

SINGLE Parents

1. Provide special training for teachers and counselors to help children of divorced, deceased or unmarried parents.

2. Schedule school conferences or "rap" sessions in the early morning or evening, or on weekends, to accommodate working parents. Provide child-care facilities at the school during the meeting. Don't assume that parents have their own transportation.

3. When sending communications home, avoid the traditional "Dear Parents" salutation. Single parents may feel a plural salutation is a condescending one. Use "Dear Parent" instead.

4. Be sensitive about traditional "Mother's Day" or Father's Day" activities, mother-daughter get-togethers, and father-son get-togethers.

5. Know the custody situation in each family. Maybe you should send duplicate notes or report cards, or scheduling separate parent-teacher conferences.

SOURCE: National School Public Relations Association

Parents of Children in SPECIAL EDUCATION

1. Find ways to include parents in already exisitng programs to enrich their child's educational experience. Develop a list of suggestions and give parents tips they can use at home.

2. Use parent observers on your evaluation teams.

3. Sponsor parent education programs. Consider using the Parent Training Parent package available through the Education Department.

4. Use parents as volunteers in the classroom to assist teachers and teacher aides.

5. Provide parental training in Individual Educational Program (IEP) development.

SOURCE: Bureau of Special Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education

Parents Whose PRIMARY LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH

1. Prepare publications, messages to the home, and other information in the primary language of the parents you are addressing.

2. Cultural differences in attitudes, styles, and practices related to education and the school should be fully understood in order for the school to avoid practices that alienate culturally-different parents.

3. Recruite volunteer interpreters to promote communication with parents who do not speak English.

4. Develop a plan to help parents of bilingual/bicultural students understand the role they can play in the educational process--at school and at home--and to share information about issues of concern to them.

5. Set up building-level bilingual education advisory committees made up of parents and teachers to assist with planning and problem-solving and to foster a positive environment for parents and students in the school building.

SOURCE: Bilingual Education Adviser
Pennsylvania Department of Education

Parents Who are MIGRANT WORKERS

1. Migrant families come from diverse ethnic groups. They come to your communities with different cultures. They may have never seen snow or owned warm clothing. Help them adjust to their new environment.

2. The family may have trouble communicating with you if English is not its primary language.

3. A bilingual person should orient program for parents on school programs, policies, and expectations.

4. Encourage migrant family members to share their culture with members of the community. Provide a forum for this exchange. Sponsor programs which allow for the sharing of music, food, customs, and traditions.

5. Teachers or school personnel can obtain academic and health information about their migrant students through the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS).

SOURCE: PA Migrant Education Program
Pennsylvania Department of Education

Parents of DAUGHTERS

1. Student surveys show that boys undervalue the lives of girls and women, that boys are encouraged to enroll in advanced mathematics courses more than girls are, and that boys' career choices are more diversified than girls' career choices. Conduct your own student survey to assess sex-role attitudes and report your findings to parents or a local newspaper.

2. When sponsoring parent nights or other events for parents, be aware of the special needs of their daughters. For example, if computer literacy is an issue, discuss the tendency of girls to be disinterested in computers.

3. When sending career or vocational education information to parents, remember to specifically mention "daughters" and "sons." Many parents are not aware that nine of ten girls today can expect to work in the labor force, and six of ten will work for about 26 years.

4. Involve parents in the celebration of Women's History Week, the second week in March. The Department of Education develops a special package for this event each year.

5. Schedule a special workshop or meeting on specific topics that parents of daughters are concerned about, i.e., girls' interscholastic sports, pregnancy and birth control, sexual harassment, or integration of girls and boys in a formerly segregated opportunities, such as after-school clubs, industrial arts, home economics courses, vocational education programs, and intramural sports.

SOURCE: Vocational Education Equity Program
Pennsylvania Department of Education

Involving Community Members Who Aren't Parents

As the population ages and school enrollments shrink, educators no longer have a choice about including non-parents in the school communications network. Non-parents are making more and more of the financial decisions affecting schools. The Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools involved 50,000 non-parents in a program to COME AND SEE FOR YOURSELF. Here are 25 of their ideas:

1. Set a goal of one non-parent visitor per pupil with incentives for pupils. Have visitors sign a guest book.

2. Make a mailing list of non-parents living near your school. Have students write personal invitations and enclose self-portraits so the visitor will recognize them.

3. Send "picketers" to shopping centers with signs urging people to "See For Yourself," or place "See For Yourself" posters in neighborhood store fronts, public buildings and meeting places.

4. Place a classified ad in the neighborhood paper with a "See For Yourself" invitation.

5. Send "See For Yourself" invitations to area churches for their weekly bulletins.

6. Get area merchants to provide "See For Yourself" coupons which can be exchanged for "freebies."

7. Start a challenge chain--challenge a well-known Columbusite to come to school, then ask that person to challenge another to "See For Yourself."

8. Compose a school song. Serenade the non-parents in your neighborhood with an invitation to "See For Yourself."

9. Watch for birth announcements in the newspaper to get addresses in your neighborhood. Send congratulatory notes along with an invitation to visit school.

10. As a class project, have students write personal invitations to a non-parent neighbor.

11. Contact employers in the vicinity of your school. Ask them to release employees for a school visit.

12. Contact real estate offices in your area and invite them to hold their next staff meetings at your school.

13. Contact business and civic organizations and suggest they tour your school in lieu of one of their monthly meetings.

14. Invite senior citizens to attend a school event, show their travel slides to a class, volunteer in the library, read to children, or eat lunch at school.

15. Offer discounts or free admission to school events to Golden Buckeye Card holders.

16. Invite senior citizens to play in the school band or orchestra.

17. Hold a 1930's or 1940's dance and invite non-parents.

18. Plan a staff meeting around some "how to" speaker--preparing tax returns, estate planning, family budgeting, etc.--and invite non-parents to attend.

19. Have a "Family Day" when all the members of your school staff invite their families to visit school.

20. Contact alumni and invite them to return. Try to arrange to have some retired teachers greet them.

21. Honor a "good citizen of the week" with an invitation to lunch or a special program.

22. Have arts and crafts demonstrations by local people. Then have a crafts fair and have students display what they learned. Make sure the community members who participated in the demonstration are invited.

23. Invite a disc jockey to visit the school--perhaps even do a remote broadcast.

24. If you have an empty classroom, make it available for public use. Offer it to a local community service agency for an office.

25. Use non-parents as judges for student contests.

Techniques for Better Communications

Publications/Communications Primer

School principals should explore a variety of publications to communicate with parents and other members of their communities. These publications include letters, newsletters, report cards, school programs, news releases, calendars, and handbooks. With each piece of information or each message, the principal should ask: Who is the audience or readership? Who is the public? Parents and the general community can be more involved and supportive when they are well informed. Here are a few suggestions:

LETTER TO PARENTS, other professionals, members of the community, and other members of the district must be neatly written and contain no misspelled words. Sentences should be simple. The message should be clear and all information should be included.

NEWSLETTERS should address events which are anticipated and report events which have occurred. The newsletter should be clearly and concisely written and the printing should be easy to read. Student writing and artwork have more appeal than that of teachers or the principal. Publish regularly and distribute as widely as possible.

REPORT CARDS should communicate to parents and students how well the studenta are working up to their potential and those areas in which parents and teachers need to work together to help the students improve. They can be the basis of conferences between teachers and parents.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS which tell the audience who the performers are, what is going to happen, and who helped behind the scenes are good communication channels for the school. Keep them simple, easy to read and in sufficient quantity so that each member of the audience may have one.

NEWS RELEASES about special events which are planned for the month or year. These releases go to parents and other citizens, not just to the local media, and can be popular items. Try to use those events for which dates will not be changed. Students may do the graphics for the cover and for extra pages inside.

HANDBOOKS, both student and teacher, are essential for every school so that the people within that school know what is expected of them. Material for these handbooks should be reviewed and revised yearly.

School communication include many things besides printed materials. These may be telephone calls, parent-teacher conferences, planning meetings, special programs to which parents and neighbors are invited, recognition ceremonies for food handlers, bus drivers, custodians, teachers, students, and clerical people, faculty meetings, and bulletin boards.

TELEPHONE CALLS are a quick and easy way for teachers and principals to reach parents to discuss students. Be sure everyone understands the importance of keeping the message simple, to the point and polite.

IN THE PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCE the teacher has an opportunity to enlist the help of the parent to find ways to guide the student to improve in certain areas or to expand in other ways. It is one of the best public relations tools the principal and teachers have.

PLANNING MEETINGS in which principal, teachers and, perhaps, students, parents, and others participate are useful. If these people can help plan a project or event, they will likely see to it that the project succeeds.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS which feature student performers are good for the self-esteem of students, teachers, and everyone else in the school. These programs can show off student accomplishments and thus improve the self-esteem of the entire school community.

RECOGNITION CEREMONIES for all members of the school community are important to the school's life. A ceremony is a very individual way of calling attention to an individual who has worked in a special way to improve the learning climate.

FACULTY MEETINGS are not only good communications among teachers and between principal and staff, but also provide time for looking ahead and planning. These should be scheduled regularly and managed with an agenda, special topics, and speakers so that they do not degenerate into gripe sessions.

BULLETIN BOARDS are a communications vehicle for student artwork, letters, notices from members of the community, announcements from organizations that work with the school (the local library or park and recreation department) and for highlighting special days or events.

Principals need to remember that communications includes a handshake and a smile and that a principal's appearance on the playground may well indicate that this is an important ball game!

Suggestions to Improve School News Writing

Written school communications compete for readership at home. Daily, mailboxes are filled with business mail, magazines, and colorful "junk" mail. Don't assume that parents and taxpayers will automatically read every piece of school information!

Follow the 30-3-30 rule. To explain: Some readers will merely glance at a publication for 30 seconds or less. Others may browse through the piece, taking up to 3 minutes to read headlines and a few articles. The serious reader will spend up to 30 minutes, reading everything carefully. The lesson here is to vary the length of articles, use bright informative headlines and place important articles for best visibility.

More suggestions to follow:

- Prefer the plain word to the fancy. Avoid educational jargon!
- Never assume your audience knows. Everyone doesn't know.
- Prefer nouns and verbs to adjectives and adverbs.
- Prefer picture nouns and action verbs.
- Master the simple declarative sentence.
- Vary sentence length.
- Put the emphasis at the beginning of a sentence.
- Put statements in a positive form.
- Cut needless words, sentences, and paragraphs. Remember the 30-3-30 rule.

- Avoid imitation. Write in your natural style.
- Write to be understood, not to impress.
- Revise and rewrite. Improvement is always possible.
- Keep it short and simple.

Telling the School Story – Communicating with the Media

Schools are literally overflowing with stories to be told. School news most frequently appears in school or district publications. But, sometimes a news item or event has impact on the total community. Then, you should consider developing a press release or exploring the possibilities of radio or television coverage. Before beginning, consider the interest level of the news item or event...

Will the item or event be of interest beyond the immediate school staff or parent community?

Is the event be open to the entire community?

Are you willing to coordinate with the varied schedules of the news media, particularly television?

* What's Happening?

News and feature story possibilities are limitless in schools today. Consider the following suggestions:

enrollment trends
student recognition
testing, test scores
music and art education
sports and drama
special education
preschool programs
special events
open house
vocational programs
work-study programs
reading programs
community education
district budget and finance
support staff
rising costs
human interest features
status reports

* Getting Started

- Set up a news gathering network. Recruit staff members, parents, and even students to be your eyes and ears in school.

- Develop a news release request form. The form should request the who, what, when, where, and how for any story. Also ask for the date, time, and photo possibilities.

* Preparing to Write

Begin collecting facts for your news release by answering the five W's and the H:

WHO is the story about or who is announcing it?

WHAT is happening or being announced?

WHERE is it happening?

WHY is it happening?

WHEN is it happening?

HOW will it happen or how will it affect the public?

Every story won't answer all six points, but most will.

Now, begin developing the press release. The following example explains how to organize the facts.

* The Technical "How-To" Details for Press Releases

1. Type the release, double-spaced, on one side of a white 8½" x 11" sheet of bond paper.

2. Source information should be placed in the top left corner of the first page (and all succeeding pages). Give the full name (no acronyms or abbreviations) of the organization or school and address. Type the release date and list your name and phone number for more information. Consider listing both your work and home number. Many releases go unprinted because a reporter could not reach a source for additional details.

3. Make the release short and to the point. Remember the inverted pyramid style of writing.

4. Become familiar with local news media deadlines. Submit materials two weeks in advance of a dated event.

5. Direct your release to a specific reporter. Get to know the education reporter and the newspaper's style. (Tip: Compare printed articles with the submitted release to see what, if anything, was changed or rewritten.)

6. Always use first and last names (John Smith or Dr. John Smith - never simply Dr. Smith).

7. If an article does not appear in print when expected, ONE follow-up phone call to the reporter to inquire about the status of the piece is acceptable. You may learn something that will help you the next time.

* Delivering the Message

- Hand-carry the material to press, radio, and television when possible.

- Use first class mail and a postage meter rather than stamps -- metered mail bypasses the cancelling machine at the local post office and frequently saves time.

- Address envelopes in advance or prepare Xeroxed mailing labels to facilitate mailing and distribution.

* What About Radio, Television and Cable TV?

RADIO - To use radio successfully, you must think sound.

TELEVISION - To use TV successfully, you must think sight and sound.

Planning for Radio. . .

- Listen to local telephone call-in shows. Topics of community interest and leads for possible stories often surface here first. Contact radio producers and suggest school personnel who might serve as guests on a local program. Perhaps the superintendent can schedule a weekly call-in program - starting with an overview or school news.

- Arrange for the local station to broadcast varsity games.

- Develop plans for the station to broadcast public service announcements (PSAs) regularly.

Planning for Television. . .

The overriding factor for station managers and assignment editors is whether the story has broad appeal. The demanding time schedules of television often make it difficult or impossible to cover school stories.

- Think of stories for television with a concern for color and movement, as well as news and interest.

- If you are requesting TV coverage for an activity, remember that TV crews travel heavy and need time to set up equipment.
- TV crews need space in which to work, to move close to the speaker, group, or class. They may need to set up lights, and need access to electrical outlets.

Writing Radio TV Public Service Announcements

Both radio and television will use timely, appropriate public service announcements (PSAs). Here are a few writing tips:

- Keep it simple. Viewers and listeners don't have the opportunity to rehear something they didn't quite understand the first time.
- Write the way you talk. Punctuation isn't as important as in printed media.
- Repeat the place and time at least once in a 30-second announcement and twice in a 60-second announcement.
- Remember that a broadcast release will be read aloud. Avoid tongue twisters, lots of "S" sounds in a row, and complicated words.
- Type and double-space your PSA. Place your name and phone number in the upper corner, so you can be contacted for more information. Mail two weeks in advance for dated events.
- Read the release out loud to make sure it sounds as well as it reads!

For PSAs or timed copy (information), use these approximate guidelines:

--for 10 seconds of copy, use 25 words

--for 30 seconds of copy, use 75 words

--for 60 seconds of copy, use 150 words

Communicating with Cable TV

Some schools have access to a cable channel on which to tell the school story. Schools should use this technology to reflect what is happening in the classrooms and in extracurricular activities that involve students and staff members.

Cable channels are desirable and marketable commodities. If schools do not use them, they will lose them. Putting schools on TV takes courage, creativity, and effort by public relations people and a committed school team. The talent is in each of our school buildings.

1. Before a cable franchise contract is signed, arrange for the school district to meet with local government officials. Cable companies sometimes give various equipment or assistance inducements to get the local cable rights. Be sure the cable company you select provides: a school access channel; some equipment you will need to start programming; a character generator; technical and programming assistance. A good local contract will keep costs down for the school district.

2. Alert the superintendent and the school board to the desirability of communicating on cable. Be sure to involve school leaders in the cable programs you produce, so that they become aware of the impact and excitement of the media.

3. Assess your equipment. Arrange to add essentials slowly as your funding allows. Fancy equipment does not assure good programming. You will need one or two cameras; one video tape recorder; lights; two or three microphones; a sync-generator (if using two cameras); a switcher fader; a sound mixer; two or three monitors; and two-way communication between the control room and the studio. The studio should be about 20' by 24' ...or the size of a normal classroom.

4. Tell instructional and non-instructional staff members that you plan to go on TV. Invite those interested to a meeting and ask for their ideas. Find out what they are interested in. Have cable company representatives bring cameras and a VTR (video tape recorder) to allow your TV committee members to see, first-hand, how easy it is to operate a camera. Invite commercial TV representatives and other experts to your subsequent meetings to discuss programming and the technical aspects of television.

Tips for Public Speaking

Most people do not relish an assignment to speak before an audience, but educators are being asked to speak more all the time. Employees, parents, and community groups are more concerned than ever before about what is happening in our schools.

Public speaking need not be a traumatic event, if the speaker is aware of and takes several basic steps:

- Know your audience. Analyze in advance what listeners want and need to hear. Then plan your comments accordingly.
- Organize your presentation carefully. Present a strong, clear, to-the-point opening that establishes the main points of the speech. Let your audience know what your objectives are at the beginning and summarize those objectives again at the closing.
- Be sure to smile.
- Stick to the essentials of your message and make only three or four major points that can be covered adequately in fifteen to thirty minutes. Most effective speeches are short.
- Pay attention to your verbal communication--language, pitch, volume, diction, and nasal tone.
- Don't forget your body language--facial expression, eye contact, and gestures.
- Your clothes and appearance say who you are. Dress conservatively and well.
- Use audio-visual aids when they support what you are saying.

- Allow time at the end of your speech for questions from the audience. Listen to the questions, give short and concise answers, and allow the opportunity for feedback.

- Don't ever be ill-prepared for your speech. It will show. Preparing an excellent speech takes more than a few minutes.

SOURCE: Pennsylvania School Boards Association; National School Public Relations Association; and Wordcrafters, Inc.

Crisis Communications

Every school district should have a plan to ensure safety in the schools and calm in the community during crises.

What is a crisis? It may be a strike, a student protest, a controversial school board meeting, a fire or accident, severe weather, or other problems that arise unexpectedly.

Here are some steps to follow during a crisis:

- Develop a list of people who should be notified of the crisis. Each crisis will warrant a different set of priority people or groups.
- The superintendent should notify all school board members of any crisis.
- The local media will want to know what is going on immediately. Have a media policy worked out in advance.
- Choose one person to be the spokesperson and insist that no one else speak for the school district. Remember that the media is a direct pipeline to the community. Treat reporters fairly by being frank and calm, but give only the facts.
- Anticipate questions from the media, parents, employees, and the general public. Prepare a statement about the crisis that will address their concerns about the crisis.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" to reporters if you do not have the answers. Be sure to get the details as quickly as possible and contact them as a follow-up.
- Keep comments brief and to the point. Don't confuse the issue with unnecessary information. Keep repeating the facts.

- Make sure that professional and support personnel are given inside information because they have a major stake in the outcome of any crisis. Staff members should know what is happening so that they can help to control rumors.

- Remain professional at all times, no matter how frustrating or emotional the situation may be.

A Checklist

Before a Crisis

_____ Have a well-defined crisis communication plan, with channels of responsibility clearly stated and approved. This must cover both internal and external channels.

_____ Select a district spokesperson. Of paramount consideration is the spokeperson's ability and personality.

_____ In advance, prepare and personally deliver "fact sheets" to all media giving names, titles, biographical sketches, dates, places--and an outline of issues--as background material to help assure accurate coverage.

_____ Your crisis plan should contain an information-gathering network and a central collection point (crisis room) near to but not in the superintendent's office. Have adequate and private telephones available.

_____ A well-established reputation for dealing honestly and fairly (credibility) with the media pays big dividends in a crisis. Press releases issued suddenly will be viewed as propaganda (especially during negotiations).

During a Crisis

____ Gather facts, prepare materials and TAKE the initiative with media representatives (you have greater credibility by going to them rather than waiting for them to come to you).

____ Don't take a definite position on an issue until facts are all collected; in the meantime, be willing to share information.

____ Be willing to admit you don't have all the answers but are committed to find them. Open and accurate communications to the public can speed verification and squelch rumors.

____ You don't have to answer seemingly emotional charges that have no basis in fact. If you have been open with the press and the public, there should be no need to be concerned about such charges.

____ Any released statements (for newspapers, radio, or television) should be written and then carefully read in an interview. An impromptu, ad lib comment to a newsman can be most embarrassing.

____ Avoid getting emotionally involved in the crisis issue; limit yourself to the facts and policy.

After the Crisis

____ Evaluate your crisis communication plan with staff, board, and news representatives and make needed changes.

____ Extend thanks to news representatives for their cooperation during the crisis. (However, don't publicly "rap" media people.)

SPECIAL NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNS

1. Every effort should be made to avoid having individual board members, or members of a school's negotiating team, issue statements on their own or

in the heat of debate. Don't start shooting (statements) from the hip. Get the facts, analyze the situation, time your response.

2. Spokespersons should sit in on all strategy meetings negotiating sessions.

3. Spokespersons must work closely with the negotiator so that communications aid resolution of bargaining and do not hinder the conclusion.

4. Do not make your response cosmetic (cover up). Aim at total solutions to negotiation problems.

5. Consider the public's point of view. Under its needs. Be positive, be candid. Determine key publics and what should be communicated to them and how. Establish feedback methods for all publics.

6. List and mobilize all possible positive sources of information for best use.

7. Presence of press at negotiating meetings is a deterrent to reaching agreement. However, boards do have an obligation to report the news promptly. Keep it general. Remember, the goal of negotiations is to reach an agreement.

8. Arrange for a 24-hour media contact schedule. Information must be available when media needs it rather than at the district's convenience.

SOURCE: The National School Public Relations Association; and George F. Lowe, Director of Public Relations, New York State School Boards Association, 111 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12210.

LITTLE THINGS MEAN A LOT

An 18-Point PR Checklist

1. How do you answer the phone? Is your voice friendly or condescending? How many times is a call transferred before the caller gets an answer?

2. How do you handle visitors in the hallways/building? Are they greeted with a curt "What are you doing in this building?" or with a friendly "May I help you?"

3. What kind of directional help is there in the building to get people to where they want to go?

4. How are the visitors greeted in the office?

5. What do you do to welcome new students on their first day in the building? Are they thrown into the crowd, or is an effort made to greet them?

6. How do you welcome and orient a new employee? Or substitute staff? Often the attitude created that first day lasts for years.

7. How do you report a student's positive progress, not just to parents but to other students as well?

8. How do students and teachers find out what's going on in the building other than through the rumor mill or lounge gossip? Find ways to systematically inform or include staff and students about school happenings. great morale boosters.

9. How are rules interpreted to people who will be affected--items like discipline, attendance, dress code?

10. How do you explain what your school stands for? What do students get here that they won't get anywhere else? In advertising parlance, what's your USP--Unique Selling Proposition?

11. How do you involve people in the regular life of the school--volunteers, parents, members of advisory committees--people who contribute to the school but rarely get to see or be involved in what is happening.

12. What do you do to attract community people to the school? Is your effort based on what they want to know? Wouldn't they be more apt to show up if they were involved in planning?

13. How are new ideas introduced to students? staff? Too much too fast often goes right down the drain.

14. Recognition of student and staff achievement is critical. How is it done in your building or your classroom? Periodic awards and public praise cost little. Find ways to let people know you care about them.

15. Do students have an opportunity or forum which encourages regular feedback in your building? Do staff members exchange ideas and information with each other?

16. What happens to the student when he or she leaves your school? Do you keep track? Do you follow up? Do you conduct opinion surveys on how students feel about their educational experiences? How about getting their recommendations on ways to improve education.

17. What do you do to put some pride in the place? Catchy slogans around which students and staff can rally can raise sagging morale and make a world of difference in the entire climate of the school.

18. How are program functions involving members of the community scheduled? Are events scheduled at your convenience, or tailored to the convenience of the public?

SOURCE: National School Public Relations Association.

Here's Help

PEOPLE

People who are willing to help you or have access to resources you can use in your parent involvement program.

William Jones, President-Elect
National School Public Relations Association
School District of Philadelphia
Parkway at 21st Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-299-7850

Judi Boren, President
Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association
North Allegheny School District
200 Hillvue Lanw
Pittsburgh, PA 15237
412-366-2100

Louise Guthrie, Vice President - East
Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association
Guthrie Associates, Inc.
Guthrie Road
Wayne, PA 19087
215-337-1199

Jacqueline Cerra, Vice President - West
Pennsylvania School Public Relations Association
Allegheny IU 3
2 Allegheny Center
Pittsburgh, PA 15212
412-394-5711

Nick Goble
Pennsylvania School Boards Association
412 N. 2nd Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-233-1642

In the Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Ann Witmer, Director
Office of Press and Communications
717-783-9802

Bertha Waters
School Equity
717-787-3048

Nancy Smeltz
Chapter II
717-783-6907

Manuel Recio
Migrant Education
717-783-6467

Linda Walter, Director
Parent Involvement Campaign
Office of Press and Communications
717-783-9812

Myrna Delgado
Bilingual Education
717-783-6649

Jackie Cullen
Vocational Education
717-783-8506

Bernie Manning
Special Education
717-783-6913

MATERIALS

Materials/Resources

1. Are You Looking for Another Approach????

   A brochure suggesting tips for parents on dealing with children in different situations requiring discipline. Developed by the State College Area School District, State College, PA 16801.

2. Footsteps

   A 30-part video series explaining the relationship between children and parents. Produced by the U.S. Department of Education. For more information or copies of the 30 programs, contact your Intermediate Unit Instructional Materials Service office.

3. Helping Youth Decide

   A 20-page booklet, produced by the National Association of State Boards of Education and the Tobacco Institute, to help parents establish and maintain open communication with their adolescents. Contact the National Association of State Boards of Education, 701 N. Fairfax Street, Suite 340, Alexandria, VA 22314, (703) 684-4000.

4. Help Your Child Achieve in School

   A 21-page magazine providing suggesting ways that parents can help their children learn, prepared by the National Institute of Education. Copies can be purchased for $3.75 by writing to the Superintendent of Documents, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

5. How You Can Help Your Child With Homework

   A brochure and parent campaign designed to get parents involved in homework assistance, produced and available through the Virginia Education Association and the National Association. Contact your local PSEA Chapter.

6. Lend A Hand: Be A School Volunteer

A brochure explaining the purpose behind the National School Volunteer Program, Inc. Available from NSVP, Suite 320, 701 N. Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

7. The Mood of American Youth

Report of student views based on a 1983 survey of American youth, produced by the National Association of Secondary School Principles, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091.

8. News For Your Parents

Handbooks, volumes one and two, which include tips for parents on ecouraging student study. Also, a catalog of resources to help parents support their children. All three are a part of the Macomb Marketing Plan, available from Communication/Management Training, Macomb Intermediate School District, 44001 Garfield Road, Mt. Clemens, MI 48044.

9. Parent to Parent Training Manual

A parent training project for special education parents, developed by the Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126-0333.

10. Parents . . . Partners in Education

A videotape program and a booklet that show parents and community groups, teachers, and administrators how they can become an effective team. Videotape - $195. Booklets - 45¢ each, minimum order - 50 copies. Discount available. Contact the American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore Street, Arlington, VA 22209, (703) 528-0700.

11. Project SPICE (Staff Programmatic Innovations in Career Education)

A parent's handbook that helps to promote career awareness and decision-making among children. For more information, contact the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, State Building, Sixth and Olive Streets, Media, Pennsylvania 19063.

12. PTA Today

A monthly magazine published by the National PTA. This informative periodical deals with such issues as alcohol abuse and our children today as well as general parent concerns and activities. Contact PTA Today, 700 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611-2571.

13. Parents, Be a Part of It

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has developed a set of four brochures and ten public announcements as part of a Parent Involvement Campaign. The theme of the campaign is "Parents, Be a Part of It." The brochures discuss the important role parents play in their children's attendance, discipline, and homework and outline strategies parents can use to help their children improve in these areas. For copies of the brochures, contact the Office of Press and Communications, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333. Also contact your local American Association of University Women branch, PTA chapter, or public library.

14. "Rights of Handicapped Students"

A brief fact sheet prepared for the Parents Union by the Education Law Center. Available from Parents Union Public Schools, Room 704, 401 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19108.

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Davies, Don, Ed. Schools Where Parents Make a Difference. Institute for Responsive Education, 704 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215. ($3.00 ppb)

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"Working With Parents." Instructor, (August 1979).

"Your Child and Educational Excellence," Timely Features, November, 1983.

Organizations

Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc. (AEL)
Division of Childhood and Parenting
P.O. Box 1348
Charleston, W.V. 25325
Telephone: (304) 344-8371

Education Commission of the States
Robert C. Anduring, Executive Director
1860 Lincoln Street
Suite 300
Denver, CO 80295
Telephone: (303) 830-3600

Education for Parenthood Program (EFP)
Administration for Children, Youth and Families
P.O. Box 1182
Washington, D.C. 20013
Telephone: (202) 755-7544

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
Program Division
600 North River Street
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197
Telephone: (313) 485-2000

The Home and School Institute
c/o Trinity College
Washington, D.C. 20017

Institute for Responsive Education (IRE)
704 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
Telephone: (617) 353-3309

National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
Telephone: (703) 860-0200

National Committee for Citizens in Education
Suite 410
Wilde Lake Village Green
Columbia, MD 21044
Telephone: (301) 997-9300

National Community Education Association
Paul Tremper, Executive Director
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Suite 305
Washington, D.C.
Telephone: (202) 466-3530

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
700 Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611
Telephone: (312) 787-0977

National School
Public Relations Association (NSPRA)
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
Telephone: (703) 528-5840

Parent Leadership Training Foundation
464 Central Avenue
Northfield, IL 60093
Telephone: (312) 835-2022

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Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SED)
The Division of Community and Family Education (DCAFE)
211 East 7th Street
Austin, TX (512) 476-6861

IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania Association of Secondary School Principals
Frank Manchester, Executive Secretary
1509 Cedar Cliff Drive
Camp Hill, PA 17011
Telephone: 717-737-6766

Pennsylvania School Public Relaitons Association
(PenSPRA)
Judith Boren, President
North Allegheny School District
200 Hillvue Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15237
Telephone: 412-366-2100

Center for Community Education
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
Telephone: 412-357-2100

Commonwealth Center for Community Education
Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania
Shippensburg, PA 17257
Telephone: 717-532-9121

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SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LANCASTER

901. PUBLIC RELATIONS OBJECTIVE

The purpose of the school-community relations program is to establish and maintain a program that informs the public of and involves them in the goals and services of the district's public schools.

The Board or committee of the Board and the Superintendent shall prepare and disseminate information to the public which reflects the official position of the Board concerning matters acted upon by the Board.

Except for statements made and adopted by the Board, or recommended by the Superintendent and approved by the Board, no administrator, teacher, or other employe of the district shall purport to represent the official point of view of the school system in public communication. Such Board Member, administrator, teacher, or other employe may give his/her opinion on matters as s/he desires, but s/he shall not state that such is the position of the Board unless the position has been officially approved or adopted.

The Board directs all professional employes to establish and maintain lines of communication with the community, not only keeping them advised in school operation, but encouraging their comments.

Teachers shall report through principals any newsworthy information which may result in press releases. Any information which has district-wide impact shall be channeled and released through the Superintendent's Office.

The Board believes that all reasonable means should be employed to keep the public informed on matters of importance regarding district policies, finances, programs, personnel and operations.

The Board will determine which of its official actions have such community impact and interest to warrant special release; it will arrange for release to the media information on such matters of importance.

Whenever notice is required to be published in one newspaper, such publication shall be made in a newspaper or general circulation as defined by the "Newspaper Advertising Act."

Proof of publications of any notice required to be given shall be made by attaching an original copy of such notice as actually printed to an affidavit. Such affidavit shall not be an interested party or an employe of any person or persons interested in the subject matter of said notice.

Each member of the Management Team shall be responsible for any material or information which s/he may release or cause to be released to the public. It shall, therefore, further be the responsibility of any such staff member to obtain the proper clearance, following guidelines established by the Superintendent, for such public distribution or release.

Within the limitations of the annual budget, the Superintendent or his/her designee shall prepare for distribution:

a. A newsletter or periodic news release which would be distributed to parents and other interested patrons of the district.

b. A publication of an abbreviated financial report which would interpret to the public how the district managed its finances during the completed school term.

The building principal shall be responsible for the internal communications within his/her school, and the Superintendent shall be responsible for communications within the district.

910. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Board of Education feels it imperative that communication be maintained in both directions between the public schools of the district and such local institutions, organizations and groups as industry, business, labor, charity, and other special interests which make up the structure of the community.

The Board has the authority over the pupils in its care, but shares that authority to a limited extent through the cooperative training programs that take certain pupils into the community during part of their educational career. To make those experiences meaningful, the Board feels cooperation is essential with the community.

The Board shall determine if the district shall be a member of the District of South Central Educational T.V., Channel 33, WITF, Hershey, Pennsylvania.

The use of the many community resources and community individuals, who are recognized authorities in their fields, shall be encouraged.

Any school organization which involves the participation of adults and students must have the approval of the principal.

ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

9.1 RESPONSIBILITY TO THE PUBLIC

The Board of Education recognizes its responsibility to the public to provide information concerning all of its actions, its policies, and details of its educational and business operations. In keeping with this recognition of responsibility, the Board enacts the following policies:

1. All regular and special meetings of the Albuquerque Boad of Education shall be open to the community.

2. An annual budget heating, open to the public, shall be held each spring for the purpose of adopting the school budget for the forthcoming fiscal year.

3. The Board of Education shall at all times make available meeting announcements and reports to the representatives of the local press, radio, and television stations.

4. A report of financial and educational activities of the school year shall be submitted annual to the Board of Education by the Superintendent of Schools. Such report shall be published by the Albuquerque Public Schools and circulated in the community and schools.

5. To inform citizens of programs and events of interest in the school system, the Albuquerque Public Schools Journal, published monthly from September through May, shall be available to citizens upon request.

6. Area advisory committees shall exist to provide for greater community involvement in the educational planning and process.

7. The civic populations as well as school employees shall be kept fully informed of school matters through appropriate public or in-house news media.

9.2 PARTICIPATION BY THE PUBLIC

The Board of Education recognizes that constructive study, discussion, and active participation by citizens is necessary to promote the best possible program of education in the community. To encourage this participation, the Board enacts the following policies:

1. Residents of the school district shall be invited to assist individually or in groups in matters of concern to the schools.

2. The Board of Education may at any time select a committee of citizens of the school district to serve as a study group to investigate certain problems. Such committees may be made up of laymen or be of a nature as lay representatives on professional committees. Each group shall be appointed by the Board of Education on recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools for a specific purpose, and after final reports have been completed, shall be dissolved. The function of such committees may not extend beyond that of study and recommendation as the Board may not legally delegate its responsibility for discretionary action to any such group.

3. The Board encourages the fullest participation by parents, teachers, administrators, and interested citizens in each school. Teachers are expected to attend parent-school meetings regularly in the school where they teach.

4. Every November American Education Week is observed throughout the United States. The Board encourages the public to visit the schools during that week and encourages school employees to make every effort to present the full picture of the school system to the public.

5. Parents and other citizens are encouraged to visit the schools throughout the school year. Conferences between such visitors and employees should be held before or after school hours. Except in emergencies, all visitors must obtain the permission of the principal before entering a classroom. In any event, their identity and purpose must be known.

9.3 USE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

The Board of Education approves of an encourages the use of community resources in order that each learning experience may be more realistic to each child. Field trips to public agencies may be conducted by a teacher with the permission of the respective agencies and enterprises.

9.4 NONSCHOOL USE OF BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

The public investment in school plants and sites and the general welfare justify the use of school buildings and grounds by local citizen groups for educational, cultural, civic, and recreational purposes outside of school hours, or when such use will not conflict with or handicap the school program. Such use of school facilities shall be properly applied for, and approved well in advance of proposed use.

Non-political, non-sectarian, and non-commercial activities such as parent-teacher, scouting, and school-directed recreational activities may at the discration of the Superintendent of Schools be granted use of school facilities free of charge. In order to cover utility, maintenance, and replacement costs for use of facilities for other purposes, the Superintendent shall set up a schedule of charges for the commonly used facilities covering normal use, and shall assess a reasonable charge to cover all other facilities and unusual wear or breakage as occasion demands.

9.5 GIFTS AND DONATIONS

The school system as a publicly supported institution may by action of the Board of Education accept gifts, grants, donations, devices, and title to property.

Presentation of memorials or other awards shall be fittingly recognized by the Board. Such recognition shall in no case be considered as a testimonial or endorsement by the school system of a product of business enterprise.

9.6 PRIVATE TEACHING IN SCHOOLS

Public school buildings may not be used for private teaching for which tuition charge is made either by staff members employed by the school district or by any other outside agencies or persons.

BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA, UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

GENERAL PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICY

The Board of Education believes (1) that the public schools must be responsible to the people who created them by consent and who support them by taxation, (2) that the schools are most effective when supported by an informed community; and (3) that the support of the people is relative to their knowledge of, their understanding about, and their participation in the aims and efforts of the public schools.

Therefore, the Board of Education declares that it shall be the policy of the Beverly Hills Unified School District: (1) to keep the various publics of the community regularly, thoroughly, and accurately informed through all available channels of communication, about all policies, programs, problems, and planning of the school system, and to carry out this policy in an atmosphere of full disclosure in a timely manner; (2) to invite the advice and counsel of the community at all times and especially at meetings of the Board of Education; and (3) to cooperate with other educational agencies and exchange information with other public bodies.

Two-way communication shall be established with the District's various publics -- students, certificated and classified personnel, parents, residents, suppliers, and other governmental and educational bodies. Emphasis in the public relations program shall be based on "information" rather than "persuasion."

Through its actions and communications, the Beverly Hills Unified School District shall (1) strive for excellence in all aspects of its educational program; (2) serve in the best interests of students, district personnel, parents, and taxpayers, and recognize its responsibility to the community, state, and the nation; (3) continually endeavor to develop a program of education that will challenge all students to achieve to the maximum of their abilities; (4) recognize that school expenditures shall be consistent with sound principles of education and public finance; (5) strive to improve human relations in contacts with all its publics, to heed their opinions, and to keep them well informed to build good will, understanding, and confidence; and (6) advance the educational program by development of high morale in an informed and concerned staff, which will continually set high standards of achievement for themselves and for the students.

It shall be the responsibility of the Supervisor of Information, under direction of the Superintendent, to develop and execute a public relations program to meet these objectives. The Supervisor of Information shall have the primary staff responsibility for official dissemination of all information concerning the District, its programs and its personnel, including material written by other school personnel for all media -- press, radio, television, and periodicals, both lay and professional. Additionally, all employees of the District shall be encouraged to recognize their roles in the total public relations program as representatives of the District in their personal contacts with the various publics and media.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

II. ORGANIZATION FOR COMMUNICATION

Although each employee has an obligation in the area, the responsibility for developing, coordinating, and evaluating the public information program of the Springfield School System is assigned to the Administrative Assistant for Public Information, under the direction of the Superintendent of Schools.

A. Public Information Representative

A public information representative is designated each year in each school in the system and is responsible for the public information functions in that school. The public information representative is either appointed by the principal or elected by the staff members of the school. In the senior high schools, the journalism advisors customarily serve in this capacity. While serving as the focal point of public information consciousness and effort within the school, the public information representative remains responsible to the principal, who should be kept informed of such activities and any proposed release of informational material. All informational material originated within a school and designed for public consumption is to be routed through the school's public information representative who will coordinate the release with the Administrative Assistant for Public Information.

In addition to providing leadership within their schools in furthering public information consciousness among other staff members, public information representatives also are responsible for these functions:

> Gather information in their schools for news stories and feature articles which will contribute to the school system's interpretation of its goals, programs, accomplishments, and needs to all its publics. If there is a time element connected with the story, the information should be provided the Administrative Assistant in sufficient time prior to the event to allow time to arrange news media coverage. Except in unusual situations, this should be at least two days prior to the event.
>
> In cooperation with the staffs at their schools, keep the Administrative Assistant advised of radio and television program possibilities in connection with the programs of their schools.
>
> Encourage staff members of their schools to participate in the speakers bureau maintained by the Office of the Administrative Assistant.

B. High School News Bureaus

News bureaus, operating as a part of the journalism program in Springfield's senior high schools, serve two important purposes. First, the news bureaus provide training for journalism pupils in producing materials for modern mass communication media. Secondly, under supervision of the journalism advisors, the news bureaus carry out many functions similar to those assigned to public information representatives in junior high and elementary schools.

Within each school, staff members should use the news bureau as a clearing house for news material. High school journalism advisors coordinate the release of materials produced by the pupil news bureaus with the Administrative Assistant, through the journalism coordinator.

C. Informational Material Initiated by the School System

When material is being initiated by the School System or by any part of the system, the Administrative Assistant shall determine the media most effective for its dissemination. Since similar material may be originating from several units within the system, all material originated from several units within the system, all material originated within the system for public consumption is to be cleared in advance through the Administrative Assistant.

D. Material Requested by News Media

When the representatives of any outside media request information on any phase of the school system's program, the staff member queried should offer all possible cooperation. The staff member should answer all questions pertaining to areas within his responsibility. However, if the reporter asks questions pertaining to areas within the responsibility of others, the staff member queried should refer him to the person responsible for that area. Pre-release clearance with the Administrative Assistant is not necessary on materials requested by outside reporters. However, staff members should inform the Administrative Assistant of any material provided, since he may be able to provide information to augment or supplement that already provided.

E. Displays

To help increase the effectiveness of displays in interpreting the educational program, the Administrative Assistant will be available for counseling in the planning of exhibits of any type. Plans for displays to be located off school property must be cleared through the Administrative Assistant.

F. News Reports

News reports should include some or all of the elements (to some degree) which go to make up news value: timeliness, proximity, significance or consequence, magnitude, policy, and human interest. To be complete, a news report (or information for a news report) should answer the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? When names are involved, both first and last names should be used. Always designate a married woman with the proper title. When pupils are involved, also give parents' names and home addresses. Avoid abbreviations. Always make certain the facts in the story are correct.

G. Publications

Both regular and special publications are developed and issued from time to time by or through the Office of the Administrative Assistant. As the need arises, such publications will be produced; when there is no longer a need for them, they will be discontinued. One of the regular publications is News and Views. It is a house organ designed to provide members of the staff, members of the Board of Education and PTA officials with information concerning the school program, or information on matters related to the school program. Particularly is this true with information which is not usually covered by the public news media.

H. Publications Consultation Service

The Office of the Administrative Assistant provides counsel to the journalism coordinator and to advisors of individual school publications in the high schools concerning problems connected with those publications. Consultative service is provided also for any school publication desiring evaluation. Two copies of any school publication on which appraisal is desired should be submitted to the Office of the Administrative Assistant. At least one copy of all individual school publications must be sent to the Office of Administrative Assistant for possible use in news material preparation.

I. Printing Consultation

The Office of the Administrative Assistant offers help in planning printing designed for consumption of any of the schools' publics. All orders for printing to be done in the school system's printing department must be approved by the Administrative Assistant and are subject to regulations developed by the department and approved by the Superintendent.

J. Radio and Television Programs

The Office of the Administrative Assistant has a dual role in radio and television program -- production and consultation. Some radio and television programs are produced by the office, arrangements are made by the office for some programs, and the Administrative Assistant serves in a consultative capacity for others, particularly instructional programs. Staff members are encouraged to submit ideas for possible radio or television programs, through their public information representatives, which will further the public understanding of the goals, programs, accomplishments, and needs of the School System. Staff members also also are encouraged to participate in such programs.

K. Speakers Bureau

All members of the staff are encouraged to participate in a speakers bureau operated through the Office of the Administrative Assistant. By participation in the bureau, staff members can help bring to various organizations in the School District information concerning the varied and vital functions performed within the School System.

L. Testimonials (Advertising)

Appearance of a staff member or school organization, when identified as such, on a commercially sponsored radio or television program might be misunderstood to mean a school endorsement of a product or service. For this reason, it is important for staff members to consult the Administrative Assistant when they have been invited to appear on a radio or television program sponsored by a firm, or an organization other than the School System. The School District of Springfield R-12 must not be identified with commercial testimonials.

COLUMBUS PUBLIC SCHOOLS, COLUMBUS, OHIO

Section 1201--RELATIONSHIP OF THE BOARD TO THE COMMUNITY

1201.01 - Responsibility for the free education of its youth is the heaviest charge laid upon any community. The Columbus Board of Education, which acts as the trustee of the people of the Columbus City School District in discharging this obligation, is mindful of its responsibility to the individual child and society in general.

1201.02 - In order to develop and maintain a program of instruction for the Columbus Public Schools which is consonant with the considered opinions of the citizens of the Columbus City School District, members and employees of the Board shall maintain channels of communication with such citizens at all times.

1201.03 - The Columbus Board of Education recognizes the various Parent-Teacher Associations of the Columbus City School District as parts of a strong national group which devotes its complete attention to the welfare of school children. The Columbus Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, composed of representatives from each individual P.T.A. unit in the Columbus City School District, is the organization that works directly with the school administration in formulating a sound educational policy. It is the policy of the Board that the Columbus Council of Parent-Teacher Associations be considered as the Board's chief lay advisory body.

1201.04 - It is the policy of the Columbus Board of Education to communicate to all publics, through all available media, information relating to the plans, programs, problems, and operations of the school system.

1201.05 - It is the policy of the Board to encourage participation on the part of the public at the regular meetings of the Board of Education.

1201.06 - It is the policy of the Board to maintain an atmosphere which makes two-way communication between the Board, administration, faculty, parents, students, and the general public a vital force in the continuing improvement of the Columbus Public Schools.

1201.07 - It is the policy of the Board to conduct a continuing program to ascertain public attitudes about the schools and their programs while conveying constructive suggestions for consideration in the planning of policies and procedures.

1201.08 - It is the policy of the Board to impress on every employee of the Columbus City School District, his or her role in the improvement of communications between the schools and the public, including reporting to proper officials the attitudes, responses and actions of groups or persons toward the Columbus Public Schools and programs.

1201.09 - It is the policy of the Board that the Superintendent of Schools shall carry on a comprehensive and continuing program of in-service training for employees in school-community communications.

From Administrative Guide to the Columbus Public Schools
Columbus, Ohio
January 8, 1974 (Revised)

MACOMB (MICH.) INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

STAFF INFORMATION PROGRAM

The board of education is cognizant of the value of a well informed staff. Therefore, the superintendent is directed to provide for standard methods of communicating to the staff those actions, events, programs and activities he deems necessary.

In implementing this policy, the superintendent, within resources available, shall take into consideration the following needs and the relative importance of each:

1. The need for all staff to be informed about the nature and function of MISD, including the publics it serves and its unique setting in the educational milieu.

2. The need for all staff to be informed about actions of the board of education, policies and regulations of the MISD and events that the superintendent deems significant.

3. The need for certain staff members to have in-depth knowledge of the kinds of services offered and the expertise available within the MISD.

4. The need for certain staff members to be kept current regarding MISD sponsored workshops, conferences, courses and other in-service activities.

The board recognizes the complexity involved in the execution of portions of this policy including obvious areas where judgments of importance and/or judgments of resources available may vary. Except in those instances when the board reserves judgment for itself, the sole judgment as to the implementation of any portion of this policy shall be that of the superintendent. Neither does this policy imply a right of any staff member to participate in any activity contained herein without approval of the appropriate supervisor.

STAFF INFORMATION PROGRAM

1. The deputy superintendent shall be responsible for submitting recommendations to the administrative cabinet for the following:

   a. A short range program designed to in-service the total staff regarding the nature and function of MISD, the services offered and expertise available in each department, and the unique role intermediate districts play in the general educational milieu.

   b. The preparation of an information document to be distributed to every staff member that summarizes the information contained in paragraph 1.a above. It shall be the intent of the MISD to prepare such a document as soon as possible and update it as frequently as need dictates; however, it is recognized that the task is comprehensive and resources available to accomplish it are limited. Timelines shall be considered as goals and not mandates.

   c. A continuing program to so inform new employees as part of their orientation process.

2. Information deemed important for all staff to know shall be communicated as follows:

   a. BOARD BRIEFS: It shall be the responsibility of the Communications Department to distribute Board Briefs to every staff member following each meeting (or combination of meetings) of the board of education.

   b. MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS: It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent's secretary to distribute a copy of the unofficial minutes of each meeting of the board as follows:

      (1) All department heads in the Service Center.

(2) All building principals.

(3) All other work locations where the physical location of the supervisor is elsewhere.

(4) The president of all unions.

Supervisors shall make their copies of the unofficial minutes freely available to any staff member they supervise upon their request or by posting in the staff lounge.

c. FOR AND ABOUT: The following kinds of information shall be published in For and About:

(1) The title and a summary statement for all new or revised policies and procedures approved. This does not include procedures that only apply to individual departments or buildings unless it is important for all staff to know.

(2) A current calendar of all MISD sponsored activities, workshops, in-service meetings, etc. It shall be the responsibility of the Communications Department to ascertain that information for all activities scheduled through the deputy superintendent's secretary. It shall be the responsibility of the division heads, department heads and principals to gather and forward all other such information within their particular jurisdictions to the Communications Department in a timely manner.

(3) Information about any item, activity, program, study, recognition of accomplishment by students and/or staff that would be interesting and informative to all staff. It shall be the responsibility of the division heads, department heads and principals to gather and forward such information to the Communications Department. The Director of Communications shall use his discretion in its use; however, if an item is not to be used, the appropriate supervisor shall be notified.

(4) Information about grants. It shall be the responsibility of the person directly in charge of any project or program funded by special grants to forward to the Communications Department a precise along with appropriate contact persons for information as soon as it is approved and ready to become operational.

d. POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUALS: Official manuals of current policies adopted and procedures approved shall be distributed as noted in Policy Code BDD of the manual.

e. INFORMATION OF A CRISIS NATURE AND/OR INFORMATION THAT GAINS CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC ATTENTION: When, in the judgment of the superintendent, there is unusual information of general concern to the entire staff he may wish to convey such information by one of the following means:

(1) Utilization of one of the vehicles of information sharing listed above.

(2) Memos.

(3) Instructive sessions conducted in various staff groupings by himself or other informed persons he so designates.

f. PAMPHLETS, BROCHURES AND DIRECTORIES: Any pamphlet, brochure or directory that is produced that is instructive about MISD or any of its operations, and which would contribute significantly to the intent of this policy shall be made available to the entire staff. It shall be the responsibility of the Communications Department to so implement and exercise judgment as to appropriate distribution to each staff member or sufficient copies to work locations to be made available to staff members on request.

3. Information that, because of its nature, is deemed important for certain staff members to know on a selective basis shall be communicated as follows:

a. When, in the judgment of the superintendent, any department is providing a service or offering expertise that may be important and useful to certain of the staff he may direct that department to provide an appropriate in-service opportunity to those persons. Such internal in-service activities are encouraged. They also may be implemented upon mutual agreement between divisions.

b. Any department sponsoring a workshop, conference, in-service activity or college course shall send copies of the descriptive literature to all other MISD departments whose staff might benefit from participation. Consequent participation of any staff member shall be only by approval of his/her immediate supervisor.

Approved 5/25/77

MEDIA RELATIONS PROCEDURES

1. The MISD encourages its staff members to respond to news media inquiries.

    a. Information provided to the news media shall be limited to public information.

    b. The superintendent shall approve each staff member speaking on behalf of the total MISD operation or more than one MISD responsibility area.

        1) Similarly, department directors and/or principals shall approve each staff member speaking on behalf of a particular school.

    c. Interviews of MISD staff members by the news media shall be limited to programs and services provided by or affecting the MISD.

    d. Department directors will inform staff members of their responsibility and procedures to follow in responding to news media inquiries.

    e. The appropriate department director and the communications office shall be notified of all news media inquiries.

2. MISD staff members are encouraged to contact the news media with information relative to programs or services in their immediate responsibility areas.

    a. The department director and communications office shall be informed of such contacts in advance.

    b. Written news releases must be approved by the appropriate divisional assistant superintendent.

c. Written news releases will follow format and style guidelines established by the communications office.

d. Written news releases prepared by MISD staff members will be issued by the communications office.

3. News conferences will not be conducted by MISD employees without the consent of the superintendent.

a. The communications office will coordinate logistics of news conferences, including invitations to the news media.

b. Whenever possible, the communications office will select the date, time and location of news conferences.

4. When a news media representative visits the MISD for information, an interview of any other reason, the staff member initially contacted by the representative shall act as that person's host during the entire visit.

5. Parental approval must be secured when the news media uses photographs of MISD programs in which students are identifiable.

Definition of terms:

news media inquiry:	Contact of an MISD staff member initiated by the news media.
news release:	Written information provided to the news media.
news conference:	A formal information-giving session to which more than one news media representative is invited.

6/23/76

MEMPHIS CITY SCHOOLS, TENNESSEE

PUBLIC INFORMATION PHILOSOPHY

The Board of Education of the Memphis City Schools recognizes its responsibility to provide citizens of the community with information concerning the schools.

Through written, oral and visual media the pupils, patrons, and general public can be guided toward a better understanding of the aims of public education and a deeper appreciation of the efforts of the school system to provide quality education for all the pupils. This can be accomplished through planning, preparing, and disseminating information which will reflect the policies of the Board of Education, the achievements of the faculties and pupils, the various activities in the schools, and the services provided by the Memphis City School System. Such a positive, factual program should result in enlightened public opinion and a climate of good will; these, in turn, will serve as constructive forces in the community.

In order to implement these purposes and goals, continuing efforts should be made to improve and increase internal, as well as external, lines of communication.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPERVISORY HANDBOOK

SUBJECT: Public Information

Board of Education Resolution 24-68, dated January 9, 1968, states the following policy regarding information about the Montgomery County Public Schools:

"The Montgomery County Public Schools shall make available to the public, insofar as it is reasonable and possible, all data about the public schools, excepting only personal information about students or staff members and the events prior to the purchase of real property for school sites.

"The Montgomery County Public Schools shall inform citizens of the policies, actions and decisions of the Board of Education.

"The Montgomery County Public Schools shall inform the citizens of the county continuously and accurately about the current state of the public schools, including both their strengths and matters needing improvement.

"The Montgomery County Public Schools shall assess periodically the informational level, attitudes, expectations, and needs of Montgomery County citizens with respect to their schools.

"The Montgomery County Public Schools shall encourage the participation of Montgomery County citizens on behalf of their public schools."

PROCEDURE:

Department of Information

A Department of Information shall be responsible, at the direction of the superintendent and/or deputy superintendent, for the dissemination of public information about the Montgomery County Public Schools. All information documents published by the central office of the school system shall be under the supervision of this department.

The department shall maintain contact with the various news media, the staff of the school system, and the citizens of the county; shall provide accurate and current information about the school system at their request on the initiative of the department; and upon direction of the superintendent, the director of information is authorized to communicate public information in the name of the superintendent of schools.

Schools and central office personnel are encouraged to consult with the director of information with regard to problems and practices of public information as they may affect their schools and offices. Schools are encouraged to send copies of school-produced newsletters, handbooks, and other documents to the information office for informational purposes.

Contact with News Media:

News media representatives are encouraged to make contacts with central office personnel through the director of information. The director will see that such inquiries are promptly referred to the individual or office that can best answer the question.

Persons representing news media or other organizations must make contact with a school through the principal. The principal will, in the manner he feels most appropriate, make available any and all information about the school, its operation and its programs, except as precluded by policy of the Board of Education. Any questions concerning the release of information by principals should be referred to the director of information.

Employees of the Montgomery County Public Schools are encouraged to respond forth-rightly to questions asked of them by the news media, groups or individuals, to the extent that they possess accurate information. Employees should not represent as policy or practice matters about which they are incompletely informed or for which they have no responsibility.

Principals and directors are requested to inform the director of information about news media contacts with their schools and offices. They should also inform the director of information about potential or existing problems of public concern, criticism, or commendation. The director will inform the superintendent and deputy superintendent and all other persons who should be informed about these contacts and problems.

Emergency Situations:

When an emergency occurs in a school or office (fire, accident, assault, etc.), the principal or director should inform the superintendent by telephone immediately. (See MCPS Regulation 525-3). The superintendent will notify the director of information who will work with the deputy superintendent and the principal or director in coordinating the release of information to the news media and the public. In such cases, no staff member except the superintendent, deputy superintendent, principal or director of information should give information to news media representatives. Strict adherence to this procedure will facilitate accurate and authoritative reporting of details to news media.

Photographs of Students:

With the approval of the principal, news media representatives may take pictures of students, faculty or other school personnel participating in school programs.

In cases where photographs are desired of students enrolled in special education, or other programs where it might be assumed that parents may not wish to have them so identified, written permission of the parents must be secured in advance of the publication of such pictures.

Articles, written statements, or Other Publications by MCPS Staff Members:

Employees of the Montgomery County Public Schools are encouraged to submit articles or other writings to professional or other periodicals for publication. Staff members should not, however, represent a policy or practice as that of the Montgomery County Public Schools unless the article containing such a representation has been approved by the person administering that policy or practice. (See also MCPS Regulations 490-1, section 7, and 520-1).

ORANGE COUNTY (ORLANDO) PUBLIC SCHOOLS, FLORIDA

Community Relations

Community Relations Objectives

The School Board approves the following community relations objectives as a guide to policy development and the monitoring of their consequences.

The School Board requests the Superintendent to present a report periodically, but at least annually, concerning the extent of attainment of the community relations objectives with recommendations for any desired improvements.

To assist the Superintendent in preparing his report, the School Board offers guiding questions for each of the adopted objectives.

Objective #1: Production and distribution of school-sponsored publications within the school system and the community (See policies 1111 through 1111.2)

A. Do school-sponsored publications exist which are designed to reach significant populations both within the school system and in the community? Offer examples.

B. What evidence can be advanced that any existing publications reach the intended populations, are read, and exert any influence?

C. Have school-sponsored publications been modified in any way because of feedback from readership? How?

D. Have the publications won any honors or otherwise commended? Offer examples.

E. How may the publications be defended as worth the time, effort and money expended upon them?

F. Does the School Board have direct communication with audiences within the school system and the community?

Objective #2: Cultivation of open, friendly, effective relations with the press, radio and TV (See policies 1112 through 1112.2)

A. Have representatives of the mass media been asked individually and collectively for their opinions and advice about press/school system relations? If so, what did they say? Did any changes take place as a result?

B. Does the school system's scrapbook of press releases and news media items offer clues to the quality of the school system's press relations?

C. Is the press generally constructive and supportive? Or not? Offer examples.

D. How effective are School Board press briefings?

Objective #3: Utilization of School Board meetings, School Board members, employees and students to enhance school-community relations (See policies 1120 through 1160)

A. Is the physical setting for School Board meetings adequate in size, comfortable, well ventilated, acoustically satisfactory and otherwise designed for audience participation? Have persons who attended School Board meetings been polled on such questions?

B. How do people in the community feel about conduct of and in School Board meetings?

C. In what ways have employees and students influenced community relations? What background of information and attitude were they provided by the school system?

Objective #4: Utilization of talents and abilities of members of the community in behalf of students and school operations (See policies 1200 through 1251)

A. What citizens' committees exist, and how effective have they been during the past year? Offer examples.

B. Do parent-teacher associations or organizations exist? How effective have they been?

C. In what ways have residents individually or otherwise helped students and the school program?

Objective #5: Utilization of the talents and abilities of students, members of the school staff and School Board, in behalf of the community (See policies 1300 through 1325)

A. In what ways have members of the school staff been active in community social work and political activities?

B. Does a tabulation and analysis of complaints concerning school personnel and instructional materials offer any clues to school/community relations? How so?

C. What statistics and examples can be offered to show how students helped enrich community life during the year?

Objective #6: Community use of school plant and facilities (See policies 1330 and 1340)

A. Who used the school plant and facilities, other than students, during the past year and for what purpose?

B. Can any evidence be advanced as to the extent of satisfaction of the users? Of the school system with the uses of the plant and facilities?

C. How can school facilities be better utilized for community services?

Objective #7: Production relations with the police and other branches of local government (See policies 1400 through 1414)

A. In what ways have police, fire, health, welfare and other departments of local government cooperated during the past year to the mutual advantage of both sides? And how may same be enhanced?

B. How are cooperation and intercommunication provided for?

C. Is the school system utilizing all available services instead of trying to duplicate them?

Objective #8: Cultivation of beneficial relations with county, state and federal levels of government (See policies 1420 throug 1440)

A. In what ways has the school system benefited from resources available at those levels of government?

B. How are cooperation and intercommunication provided for?

C. Is the school system utilizing all available services instead of trying to duplicate them?

Objective #9: Maintenance of productive relations with associations interested in education (See policies 1500 through 1540)

A. What kinds of associations does the school system or major divisions either belong to or work with? To what advantage?

B. Does the school system retain its autonomy?

Objective #10: Cooperative relations with special purpose schools, colleges and school districts (See policies 1600 through 1650)

A. Which such organizations are included? What is the nature of the affiliations?

B. In what ways does the affiliation with each such organization improve this school system's community relations image - and improve school services?

The School Board will make a periodic, but at least annual estimate, based upon the report of the Superintendent, of the extent of attainment of the community relations objectives for the preceding school year and record its ratings.

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Community Relations

Communication with the Public and School Personnel

In developing a Community Relations Program, it shall be clearly recognized that education is most likely to achieve significant goals through a high level of school-community understanding. Without a thorough knowledge of the school and its relations to the community, the development of a program cannot be carried on in an effective manner. Fundamentally, the issues are that of communication and of education. It is a matter of assisting the community in gaining knowledge of the School Department's operation, its potential, and of the procedures through which this potential may be realized, thereby establishing the climate and the value level for public decision making.

The implementation of a program to promote school-community cooperation should be influenced by the following guidelines:

1. Multi-Directional Communication is essential and must be both the basis of the program and of its purposes.

2. The difficulty of the task, as well as the variety of possible ends and media, demand careful planning.

3. The planned program should be integrated with the more routine work in the field of school-community relations that is established with reference to legal requirements, events on the school calendar, and seasonal opportunities regarding aspects of the total educational program.

4. Reporting is an essential element of the total program and needs to be developed in an effective manner with reference to the variety of groups to be reached.

5. Involvement of many citizens is desirable for it places the problem in the hands of many more people for consideration and the formulation of tentative solutions.

6. A wide variety of media should be employed, as different media may involve or reach different groups or may have a different impact.

7. The significance of the individual school in school-community relations should be recognized, as the communities or neighborhoods served by schools vary widely and, consequently, the programs at the school level need to be characterized by variation.

8. The Central Office Administration should take responsibility for a few system-wide school-community relations activities, but primarily should concentrate their energies on the development of staff level personnel for more effective participation in the work.

9. Responsibility for coordination and leadership in school-community relations should be the responsibility of a person from the existing staff.

10. Evaluation of the program and its various aspects is of vital importance.

Providence Public Schools
Providence, Rhode Island

Policy adopted: April 20, 1971, Resolution #668

Community Relations

Media Communications

The inevitability of communications in the school-community relations area must be recognized. The challenge is making maximum utilization of the sufficient number of media of high validity to improve the understanding of schools and the community to enable them to progress together. Therefore, unless the facts and the positions for public education are put forth vigorously through the most effective instruments employed in our society, the gap between the people's desires and practices in education will widen.

The promotion of school-community relations via the media, then, is not a matter of disseminating propaganda or a development of essentially reporting or interpreting, rather it is the carrying forward of a public enterprise with laymen and educators playing respective roles to build mutual understanding in depth.

This will require that emphasis be given by the School Department to the following aspects in relating to the community and the schools through the media:

1. Media relations should facilitate rather than militate against the cooperative solutions of educational problems.

2. Media relations should periodically reexamine the School Department's philosophical commitments and use them as standards for evaluating practices and making comparisons.

3. Media relations should clarify the goals of planned research and the results of cooperative studies in order that they may be seen as an opportunity for many to learn more about an issue.

4. Media relations should increase the awareness of layment regarding the complexity of the issues so that the demands for simple solutions may be reduced, especially those involving a return to some practice that may

have worked reasonably well under far simpler and quite different circumstances.

5. Media relations should address the questions of what unique or special role belongs to the schools that can be separated from the educational programs fulfilled by other agencies and of what special relationship the schools have to the educational activities of other agencies.

Providence Public School
Providence, Rhode Island

Policy adopted: April 28, 1984

WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOL
North Carolina

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

It is the policy of the Board of Education to maintain honest, open, two-way communications with parents and citizens of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County.

The Board of Education strongly endorses the publication of brochures, slide shows, internal and external newsletters, and the use of external media in order to tell the story of public education clearly and often. The Board subscribes to the philosophy that news and information should not be hidden from the public, and that when all of the facts are known, the public will increase its support of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools. The communication of these facts will be implemented by the Superintendent through the office of School-Community Relations.

The Coordinator of School-Community Relations will serve the various news media as a source of information and guidance in reaching the proper source for news information. He or she will arrange television and newspaper interviews for the Administrative Staff and will further serve as a liaison to the general staff for the purpose of assisting news media in obtaining interviews with appropriate personnel. This in no way precludes news media going directly to news sources when they have specific needs.

The Coordinator of School-Community Relations may interpret for the news media the decisions and actions of the Administration and the Board of Education when the Chairperson or Superintendent so directs.

Statements and news releases will be made by the School-Community Relations Coordinator on a regular basis in consultation with the Superintendent to increase community knowledge and understanding of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools.

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A School Communications Checklist

The following checklist can be adapted to individual school conditions, reproduced by the principal or the Home and School Association, and handed out to the parents as a "let's-evaluate-each-other" exercise. At the very least, the principal should put him/herself in the parents' shoes and have a go at it alone. Tallying the scores is irrelevant in the final analysis. Every "no" or "don't know" is worth working on, and too many of either signals a problem that should not be ignored.

A SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS CHECKLIST

As we approach the middle of the school year it's time for all kinds of evaluations. But while we're testing the kids to make sure they have done all they are supposed to do, let's look at our efforts to communicate with parents and see whether we've done a good job. The best way to do that, according to an article in The Network, publishes by the Education Resource Network in Rochester, N.Y., might be to put a checklist in the hands of parents and ask them to rate the quality of home-school communication during the school year.

What the checklist shows is that a good communication effort is not the sole responsibility of either side. Steps must be taken by school people and parents to ensure that the parent-teacher team is functioning on all cylinders. Here is the checklist published by The Network for parents, but just as important for school people to ponder - 20 questions to be answered Yes, No, or Don't Know:

____ 1. My child likes (and feels comfortable) attending this school.

____ 2. Discipline seems fair and consistent.

____ 3. There is good effort to help students to be kind, thoughtful, and cooperative.

____ 4. The principal is friendly and tries to know most of the children and their families.

____ 5. Most people in the school are part of a team, are aware of the total school scene, and cooperate on programming, discipline, and school spirit.

____ 6. The atmosphere, or learning "climate," is free of tension and promotes good learning.

____ 7. I am satisfied that my child is reading at a level sufficient to keep up to class work.

____ 8. The school informs me about my child's progress (and problems, if any).

____ 9. Homework is given and graded and I'm able to get a good idea of how my child is progressing.

____ 10. I received a copy of the 1981-82 school handbook.

____ 11. Newsletters arrive home regularly and in time to plan for school events.

____ 12. Newsletters are useful, to the point. They inform us about programs, holidays, school rules, parent activities, etc.

____ 13. The parent group is in touch with important matters in the school and is consulted regularly by the principal.

____ 14. Parents can easily get in touch with the parent group and pass on concerns and interests.

____ 15. Invitations to attend parent meetings seem genuine and meetings are held when most parents can attend.

____ 16. I know whom to contact if I have a concern or problem.

____ 17. I have had a good parent-teacher conference already this year. (If my child is in secondary school, I have talked to his/her main teachers.)

____ 18. I contact the school about any problem which might affect my child's learning behavior.

____ 19. I check my child's homework regularly to see if it is completed and/or correct.

____ 20. I have made a point to visit the school and introduce myself to the principal and my child's teacher(s).

SUGGESTED WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD AT HOME

Concord (Massachusetts) Public School, 1970

Learning is a cooperative venture involving parent, child, and teacher. At school the child does required work under teacher supervision. In order for learning to be a continuous process, children do need home study. This means helping a child set reasonable goals and giving him a time and a place to study. Parent interest will be the cohesive factor in promoting voluntary home study. The following is a list of activities that may be undertaken to help your child at home.

(1) Help your child learn to follow directions.

(2) Help your child develop listening skills.

(3) Discuss varied topics with your child to help him develop critical thinking skills.

(4) Encourage your child to be aware of current events, newspapers, magazines, and TV news programs.

(5) Suggest projects which enrich science and social studies.

(6) Hear your child practice oral reports.

(7) Help your child develop proofreading skills.

(8) Have your child practice number facts and other arithmetic skills.

(9) Help your child use the library.

(10) Play games to develop reading, vocabulary, map skills, arithmetic skills, etc.

(11) Develop vocabulary by giving your child a new word to use each day.

(12) Encourage your child to seek a pen pal.

(13) Help your child learn to summarize the main idea of a book, a story, or a TV program.

SOURCE: *Barth, Roland S. Run School Run.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION AT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parents' Guidelines

Knowing the relationships a child has with his environment at home or in the neighborhood can give the teacher a great deal of insight into the child's social and academic adjustment at school. With this in mind, would you consider the following points in preparation for your conferences with your child's teachers. Please remember that this is not necessarily an outline for the conference. Topics will be discussed only as parents or teachers feel they apply to the particular child. It is hoped that the conference will be an exchange of information on the part of both parent and teacher.

I. Social adjustment of the child

  A. How the child sees himself
  B. The child's relationships with other children
  C. The child's relationships with adults
  D. Acceptance of individual responsibilities
  E. Characteristics that might affect school performance

II. Adjustment to academic tasks

  A. Attitudes and work habits
  B. Motivation
  C. Skills in independent situations
  D. Skills in group situations

III. Academic performance in relation to self or total group

  A. Progress in skills areas
  B. Performance in other academic areas
  C. Specific suggestions for improvement

IV. Physical problems

- A. Temporary
- B. Permanent

V. Possibilities for home enrichment

General Information on Conference [For Teachers]

(1) It is an emotional and factual exchange to fill in knowledge and to offer special knowledge.

(2) Listen completely to what the child or parents have to say. Make no judgment or interpretation. Do not jump to conclusions.

(3) Never label a child, even in a joking way.

(4) Never mention another child by name or give information about other children.

(5) Avoid giving personal opinions.

(6) Use professional experiences as samples. Avoid using personal experiences.

(7) Keep an open mind about the validity of your own judgment.

(8) Do not give false reassurance.

(9) Do not give suggestions without a good understanding of the child and his situation.

(10) No one has all the answers. Make referrals to the social worker, the school nurse, the family physician, or other appropriate resources.

(11) The parent-teacher-child conference can be a valuable tool when used correctly. It requires a thorough knowledge of the parent and the child, however. In considering such a conference the teacher should consider carefully the feelings of the child and the predictable outcomes. If such a conference seems likely to put the child in the middle, it should not be held.

(12) The manner in which the teacher marks the daily work also reflects the philosophy to which the system is committed. Papers are diagnostic devices and judgments made regarding their quality indicate their positive rather than negative value.

(13) Be observant--What he says. What he doesn't say. What significant gaps there are in the conversation. Body tension. Excitement. Dejection.

(14) Be a good listener--Begin with child's or parent's concerns and interest. Let them express themselves first. Indicate your understanding by brief comments and significant questions. Parents may reveal their anger or dissatisfaction with the child's school experience. Listen carefully. Give explanations and facts. Do not take sides.

(15) To Question--the central method of conferences is the fine art of questioning:

The wording of the question is often less important than the manner and tone of voice in which it is put.

Do not ask too many or too few questions.

Ask questions in order to understand and be of assistance, to obtain specific information, and to keep the conference going.

Keep pace with the child or parents. Don't push for information. Do not try to get all the information from one conference.

(16) To Talk--Talk to reasure, to encourage, to explain, to offer information, to give answers.

Answer personal questions in a frank, brief, truthful way. This should be followed by an immediate redirection of the child's or parent's attention back to the conference.

Support positive feelings, reduce misunderstanding, and discourage unrealistic expectations.

(17) To Conclude--"Maybe my answer wasn't clear to you." Is there something else you wish to ask/talk about?"

Parents often ask, "What do you think we can do?" Sometimes it is well to answer, "What do you think you can do?" thereby involving the parents in planning and decision making.

Teachers and parents should see eye to eye on their goals and should be completely comfortable with one another, and noncompetitive.

Plans must be realistic to the child's and parents' ability and capacity to carry them out.

Do not give suggestions when the child or parents is/are unable to act upon them.

(18) To Summarize--Kept the Academic, Social, and Physical in mind.

Where did the child/parents agree with what the teacher said?
Where disagree?
What did the child/parents say with the most feeling?
To what did the child/parents show no response?
What did the child/parents want to talk about most?
How did the child/parent explain the child's school performance?
What do the parents expect of the child in school?

What did the child/parents suggest should be done by the parents, the teachers, and the child?

How is the teacher's view the same or different from the parents?

What intellectual and social stimulations are provided for the child at home?

SOURCE: Concord (Massachusetts) Public Schools, 1970

TEN TIPS TO PARENTS ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

TRUST YOUR COMMON SENSE AND YOUR OWN ABILITIES. Expect to make a significant input into your child's education; educational research and common sense experience indicate that parents are their child's most important teachers.

KNOW THAT EDUCATION STARTS BACK IN INFANCY, way before the "regular" school years. Take advantage of those early learning years through home-teaching activities that teach and are enjoyable at the same time.

PROVIDE SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCES AT HOME THAT HELP YOUR CHILD SEE HERSELF, as a person who can do, who can accomplish. Both home and school need to provide ways for children to demonstrate their abilities, from the garden to the kitchen to the classroom.

SEEK WAYS TO LET THE CHILD, EVEN THE VERY YOUNG CHILD, know that he or she is NEEDED, that he/she is important, that it really matters that the child is around. This builds confidence and self-esteem so necessary for school success.

START TRYING AND COMPILING IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH CHILDREN at home; choose among them so that they are appropriate to the time, energies and abilities of that particular day, the parent and the child. Mobilize: be helpful, not helpless.

RELAX: KNOW THAT NEITHER YOU NOR THE TEACHER NEED BE PERFECT to educate a child well. Remember that no one day or year in school will kill your child's abilities and creativity: kids are more resilient than we think.

EXPECT THAT WHEN YOUR YOUNGSTER DOES ENTER "REGULAR" SCHOOL that the teacher will be welcoming, will keep you informed, will ask for your advice, and will use your abilities.

TRY TO BE A CONSTRUCTIVE, BUT IF NECESSARY, CRITICAL Part of the school family. Expect to ask questions, to talk up at meetings and conferences. Don't ever be ashamed of being "just" a parent.

STOP GRIPING ABOUT THE SCHOOL ACROSS THE BACK FENCE: if you have information to share (a projected move, a change in family situation), a complaint or problem, even praise, take it to the school. Try to keep from getting butterflies in your stomach when you go through the school door--you are not the student anymore.

EXPECT THE SCHOOL TO HAVE A GUIDING PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: expect this philosophy to be communicated to you; expect the school to share with you many ways in which you can supplement your child's education at home so that home and school can work together in an educational partnership.

SOURCE: "The Home and School New Educational Partnership", The Home and School Institute, Washington, D.C.

WHAT SHOULD SCHOOL OFFICIALS EXPECT FROM PARENTS?

A. Courtesy and understanding.

B. That parents seek out, read and explain all school rules and regulations to all of their children.

1. That parents inform each child of what will happen if the rules and regulations are not followed.
2. That parents encourage their children to follow these rules and regulations.
3. That parents contact the school officials about:
    - a. rules and regulations that they don't understand.
    - b. changes that they would like to see in rules and regulations and why.
    - c. better solutions to problems that they might have that are not provided by the rules and regulations.
4. That they confer with school officials whenever there is a problem with their child.

C. That parents read all progress reports and explain them to the child and ask proper questions of the child.

1. That they seek questions concerning their child's progress.
2. That they seek out reasons for and solutions to poor academic achievement or behavior of their children.
3. That parents seek out and cooperatively work with school officials whenever physiological and other services are indicated for their child.

D. That parents frequently check their child's records and become involved in all aspects of the child's development.

1. Parents who do not know what courses their child is taking, who the teachers are, and how well the child is doing cannot fulfill their obligation as parents.

2. Parents who do not periodically consult with their child's teachers and administrators cannot fulfill their obligation.

E. That each parent know something about what his child is learning in school by doing the following:

1. Checking the texts and materials which are brought home.
2. Periodically asking about and seeing homework assigned and prepared by the pupil.
3. Asking to see all schedules, syllabi, etc. given to the child.
4. Asking about all tests and results given to the child.

F. That parents exercise their right to contact the appropriate school officials whenever the need is seen by the parents and/or their children.

G. That parents check and make sure that information about proper procedures are available and that the child understands these procedures and is protected and served by them.

The educational responsibilities of the school and parents are interrelated. No greater obligation falls on the one more than the other. If each party takes an active rule in fulfilling their obligation, a more healthy and viable learning situation for the student will result. Misunderstandings and conflicts which interfere with a child's education will be eliminated.

SOURCE: ESAA Staff/Division of School Equity
Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1981

WHAT SHOULD PARENTS EXPECT IN THEIR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

A. Courtesy and professionalism by school officials and all members of the school staff.

B. Prior knowledge of rules and regulations for running the school:

1. Which are explicit as to their intent
2. Which detail punishments if they are violated so that any student or parent could understand them
3. Which have built-in fairness and consistency in their application
4. Which provide a change for students and parents to be heard when there are conflicting interpretations or application of the rules and regulations
5. Which provide a chance for parents to be involved
    a. to be contacted when the child is in trouble
    b. information on what the trouble is made available to them, i.e., what rule has been broken
    c. information on what is to happen being made known to the parent and the child
    d. information on any possible appeals if a determination has been made such be made known to the parent
    e. information on what parents must do to settle the problem
        1) if they must appear with the child at a hearing or a conference concerning the problem
        2) the relative seriousness of the incident at the time they are contacted.
6. Rules and regulations should be available to parents as well as to students

C. Progress reports

1. Normal period reporting
2. Reporting when a child is having:
    a. academic problems - this should be done prior to failure
    b. adjustment problems - this should be done prior to trouble, if possible
    c. discipline problems
3. Psychological reports
    a. a full explanation to the parent is mandatory
    b. interpretation of results to parents is a necessity in language that they can understand
    c. access to psychological service people and to their child's records is a must

D. Availability of all the child's records

1. Grades, notes from staff on student evaluations, psychological records, test scores and interpretations of test scores, discipline records, and all other kinds of data should be made known to the parent by the school
2. Time to discuss these with teachers, special service people, and administrators must be made available to parents

E. Knowledge of their child's instruction

1. What they will be exposed to in the way of:
    a. books
    b. curriculum
    c. staffing
    d. schedules

    - e. other school activities
    - f. testing
  - 2. Features of their school's physical facilities such as:
    - a. a right to visit their school at any time with or without invitation
    - b. a right to see programs and facilities in their schools in action

F. Knowledge of who they should contact if they have a problem and how they can reach the proper person

  1. Title of the person
  2. Responsibilities of the person
  3. Accessibility of the person
  4. Organization chart so the parents will know how to go through the proper channels without being shunted to another area

G. Proper procedures for the following:

  1. Emergency situations
     - a. health
     - b. weather
     - c. other
  2. Parent-teacher conferences
  3. Advisory roles guaranteed by local, state, or federal law

SOURCE: ESAA Staff/Division of School Equity
Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1981

SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS?

Please indicate on the scale (circle) the degree to which the following characteristics are present in the parent/community involvement program in your school or district. If possible confer with PTA officer or other parent to complete this.

	LOW				HIGH
A staff person responsible for parent/community involvement activities	1	2	3	4	5
Open channels of communication between school and community	1	2	3	4	5
Regular meetings and/or conferences	1	2	3	4	5
Home visitation	1	2	3	4	5
Parents feel at home in school building(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Community use of building(s)	1	2	3	4	5
Parents/community involved in policy decisions	1	2	3	4	5
Bilingual person on staff where a significant bilingual population attends	1	2	3	4	5
Parents visit/work in classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Parents reinforce school goals at home	1	2	3	4	5
District/school provides parent education programs	1	2	3	4	5
Reduced discipline problems due to parent involvement	1	2	3	4	5

High level of openness and trust between school and community	1	2	3	4	5
High parent satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
Parent-initiated involvement	1	2	3	4	5
High pupil satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
High staff satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
Shared philosophy by school and home/community	1	2	3	4	5
High rate of parent meeting attendance	1	2	3	4	5
Improved student attendance	1	2	3	4	5
Improved student achievement	1	2	3	4	5

PARENT INTEREST SURVEY

Name ________________________________ Phone ______________

Address ____

We are asking for your help in order to enrich and enlarge your child's program at school?

Do you have a hobby to share? ___________ Please specify. ___________

Do you have talent(s) you are willing to share? (cooking, sewing, woodwork, music, art, dramatics, other?) What? ____________________

Do you have an occupation or an association with a local business or industry of interest to children? ______________________ If yes, please specify. ____

____

Would you be interested in helping with any of the following. If so, please check.

_____ telephoning

_____ making Parent Advisory Council materials (tracing kits, arts & crafts, etc.)

_____ typing

_____ chaperoning on field trips

_____ writing or planning a periodic newsletter

_____ bulletin boards

_____ hostess a home coffee

_____ clerical work

_____ other (specify)

Do you have some ideas of ways you'd like to become more involved in such a school program? ____

What time would you be able to be with us? Please check.

_______ before school

_______ noon

________ other

_______ morning

_______ afternoon

________ after school

What times would you need a babysitter, if at all? ________________________

Are there others in your family or neighborhood who would be interested in this program? ______________________ If yes, please specify. ______________

RMF 9980B

50 WAYS TO INCREASE HOME SCHOOL COOPERATION

1. Create a "How Parents Can Help" handbook which gives practical suggestions for home activities such as making out grocery lists, nature walks, etc.
2. Invite a few parents to a coffee hour with the principal. Hold it at the home of the PTA leader.
3. Vary the times for Open Houses. Hold some in the afternoon, some at night.
4. Invite several parents to sample the school lunch once a month. Seat them with the principal, a teacher and several randomly selected students.
5. Hold a "Senior Citizen Day" at the school, inviting grandparents and other older friends of the school. Provide transportation.
6. Invite new teachers and new parents to a tour of the district. Cover points of interest, local churches, facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of attendance area.
7. Arrange athletic and academic contests between parents and students and teachers.
8. Provide an opportunity for parents to get together with other parents for discussions about school problems.
9. Send home "Happy-Grams" --good news notes about accomplishments and achievements.
10. Use parents as field trip helpers and observers.
11. Make progress charts--one at school for the teacher and one at home for the child and parent.
12. Set goals for each child and send home notes that parents must sign and return.
13. Have children prepare a luncheon for parents, teachers and themselves. Send hand written invitation.
14. Start "Saturday Clubs" to provide enrichment programs, film showing, family recreational activities, etc. at the school.
15. Set up projects where children bring things from home.
16. Make it possible for teachers to make home visits at least occasionally.

17. Set up parent conference days during the school year for parents to come to school to discuss progress with their child's teacher.
18. Have students interview their parents abut how life has improved since their childhood.
19. Recruit parents to spend an hour or two each week helping in their child's classroom.
20. Establish a classroom speakers bureau with parents or relatives of hildren sharing their experiences, hobbies, job information, etc.
21. Have students conduct a survey of parents to evaluate the school and collect ideas for improvement. Distribute the survey results to all parents.
22. Use parent volunteers as tutors for students having difficulty.
23. Ask parents to assist in special clinics, the library or counseling area.
24. Set up high school parent advisory councils to assist in curricular and instructional changes and to aid in establishing goals and objectives in each department.
25. Establish a homework hotline for parents to check on nightly assignments.
26. Hold high school department seminars for parents to help them help their children gain the most out of particular course offerings.
27. Establish regular visitation days for observation of classes and a chance for parents to offer constructive suggestions.
28. In each month's newsletter, publish the names and phone numbers of a few parents who are willing to talk to other parents about any kind of interest or concern.
29. Advise parents of the teacher's conference periods or other best times to reach the teacher.
30. Assign homework that requires parental input and participation.
31. Encourage teachers to become more visible in the community.
32. Advertise one evening a week when parents or students can telephone the principal to ask questions or discuss problems.
33. Help parents who are non-readers to prepare their children to learn to read.

34. Encourage parents to praise their child's successes.

35. Occasionally ask the child to have parents call the teachers rather than have the teacher contact the parents.

36. Set up an idea exchange in the school newsletter. Ask parents to send in ideas. Then, in a later issue of the paper, publish the ideas and how they were used.

37. Take note of the fact that more fathers are participating in PTA. Be sure to include fathers in all school communications.

38. Involve parents in discussions about junior high school while their children are still in elementary school. Do the same for junior high parents before their children reach senior high.

39. Set up a plan for principals to make "house calls."

40. Establish a Home-School Cooperation Committee. Exchange reports with other schools.

41. Urge teacher training institutions to place more importance on home-school cooperation in their teacher education programs.

42. Conduct surveys and provide parents with research on such things as average hours of sleep per night by grade, average hours devoted to homework, television viewing, etc.

43. Have parents contact colleges with suggestions for potential teachers.

44. Link up parents of expelled or suspended students with parents who have successfully dealt with similar problems.

45. Invite parents of a child having difficulties to meet with staff to explore ways to help and to use preventive techniques.

46. Seek out the parents who never participate. Sometimes this parent feels inadequate or timid and simply needs to be encouraged and needed.

47. Hold staff workshops on communications skills with a special focus on parents.

48. Be sure that teachers are represented and recognized at PTA or other parent group meetings.

49. Make an effort to improve the telephone answering techniques of everyone in the school office.

50. Use this list of 50 ideas as a discussion guide to develop 50 more ideas for increasing home-school cooperation.

SOURCE: Columbus Public Schools.

UNITY

I dreamed I stood in a studio
And watched two sculptors there.
The clay they used was a young child's mind
And they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher -- the tools he used
Were books, music and art.
The other, a parent, worked with a guiding hand,
And a gentle, loving heart.

Day after day, the teacher toiled with touch
That was careful, deft and sure.
While the parent labored by his side
And polished and smoothed it o'er.

And when at last, their task was done.
They were proud of what they had wrought.
For the things they had molded into the child
Could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed they would have failed
If each had worked alone.
For behind the parent stood the school
And behind the teacher, the home.

Author Unknown